ISSUE 328
EMPIRE OCTOBER 2016

MASSIVE WINTER PREVIEW

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THIS MONTH AT EMPIRE

HELLO! IT PROBABLY goes without saying that we are excited. Like, insanely excited. This has been something of a tumultuous year for cinema so far (Highs! Lows! Crushing disappointments! Surprise hits!), but the moment we've been waiting for is here: the very first, super-exclusive look at *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*. Everything we've seen up to now has raised our heart rates significantly. Then our own Dan Jolin spent time getting under the skin of the first standalone origins story with director Gareth Edwards and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy. It's shaping up to be gritty, action-packed and kind of dark, and we are *thrilled*. It's perfect to propel us into *Episode VIII* next year.

Looking forward as we are to the end of the year, it seems the perfect time to see what autumn and winter hold. With *Doctor Strange*, *Fantastic Beasts And Where to Find Them*, *American Pastoral*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Deepwater Horizon* and *A Monster Calls* all lying in wait (among others), it's fair to say the best is yet to come.

Speaking of which, I must point you in the direction of p.86 — on which you will find a story by Jim Hosking, director of one of this year's most out-there films. *The Greasy Strangler* is surreal, gross, twisted and really, *really* funny. Since I saw it one morning in June with coffee and pastries (not a wise move), I haven't been able to get it out of my head. If you've got a strong stomach and a crooked brain, give it a watch. And on that last bit, we can actually help.

This month (23-25 September, to be precise) sees the inaugural Empire Live, our film and entertainment event at The O2 London where we'll be hosting screenings, script-reads, parties, masterclasses, interviews, panels and quizzes. We'd love you to join us — tickets are available at empirelive.com. Do say hi — and in this instance, coffee and pastries would be entirely fitting. Unless it's prior to our preview of *The Greasy Strangler*. Good lord, man! Take them away!

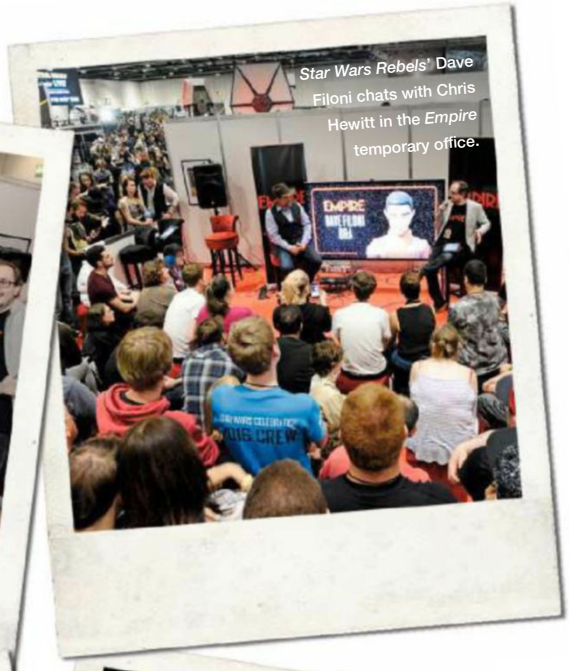
Terri.



TERRI WHITE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



The Empire team spent the weekend in a pop-up office at Star Wars Celebration Europe.



Star Wars Rebels' Dave Filoni chats with Chris Hewitt in the *Empire* temporary office.



Chris Lupton encounters a rather bright Wookiee during the event.



Anthony Daniels, aka C-3PO, aka legend, being interviewed by James Dyer.



Nick de Semlyen with Danny Trejo at Comic-Con 2016 in San Diego. Photo by Danny's son Gilbert.



Terri White moderates the Jameson First Shot short film contest, alongside Maggie Gyllenhaal.

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID MAHONEY

head & shoulders

SHOULDERS CAN CARRY ANYTHING

BUT DANDRUFF



Visible flakes seen at 2ft with regular use

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TALK TO US

COMMENT OF THE MONTH

FLYING HIGH



Lucky as I've been this year, I thought I'd write to my favourite magazine and try to win the prize for letter of the month. I went on holiday with my wife and two daughters and we met Elle Fanning at Luxembourg airport. Next we came across Matthew Perry in Heathrow, then Liv Tyler and her baby on the flight to New York. I'm hoping we'll meet Lin-Manuel Miranda soon.

JÉROME MUSLEWSKI, VIA EMAIL

One tip if you do encounter Lin-Manuel in transit, Jérome: talk less, smile more.

Picturehouse Empire's star letter wins a Picturehouse Membership, plus one for a friend! Valid for one year at 23 Picturehouse Cinemas across the UK, including the brand-new Picturehouse Central in London's West End, each membership comes pre-loaded with four free tickets, and gets you access to priority booking and exclusive discounts on everything in the cinema. When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.

PHIL HAVERCROFT ON THE *KONG: SKULL ISLAND* TRAILER:

"SOME OF THE SHOTS LOOK VERY *APOCALYPSE NOW*. OR SHOULD I SAY APE-OCALYPSE NOW?! I'LL GET ME COAT."

ZANE ACCLAIM

I've been reading your magazine for 20 years now, and I've seen features come and go. Some I've enjoyed and would love to see again, like Where Are They Now?. Others have left me scratching my head, like Billy Zane's agony-uncle section — something I've always bypassed. However, this morning I found myself flicking through an old issue, struggling to find something I hadn't read on my first pass. With no other option I thought I'd give the man a go. What a revelation. Not only witty and thoughtful, but full of sage advice. I doubt you no more. Billy Zane is officially my god.

ALEX, BOREHAMWOOD

Billy, we've told you before — your job is to answer letters sent to the mag, not to send in your own.

GRUBER ENTHUSER

Though I enjoyed your 50 Greatest Villains Of All Time feature, it was somewhat shocking to find no Hans Gruber! I get he was only a "common thief" (though an exceptional one who was moving up to kidnapping), but his style was second to none!

JASON SCOTT, CALDERWOOD

We were also surprised to find no room for Hans' brother, Simon, or his third cousin, Dietmar, or indeed his university flatmate, Randy.

JUST ONCE IT WOULD BE NICE FOR SOMEONE TO ANSWER, "HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?" WITH "ASK THE COWS"

@MACARONE_TONY

YORKSHIRE PUDDING

Your piece on British accents reminded me of Josh Hartnett trying to do a Yorkshire one in *Blow Dry*. He seemed to use every accent in the British Isles in the hope it'd be right now and then.

TOM CLAYTON, VIA EMAIL

That was Yorkshire? We thought he was from Iceland.

CONTACT US VIA:

EMPIRE MAGAZINE, ENDEAVOUR HOUSE, 189 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, WC2H 8JG / **LETTERS@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM / @EMPIREMAGAZINE (#EMPIRELETTERS) / FB.COM/EMPIREMAGAZINE**

EMPIRE

EDITORS
Editor-In-Chief
Terri White

Deputy Editor
Jonathan Pile
020 7295 6722

ART
Creative Director
Chris Lupton
020 7859 8642

Deputy Art Director
James Ramsay
020 7859 6447

Designer
Olly Gibbs
020 7295 8595

Junior Designer
Ally Wybrew
020 7295 8570

WORDS
Associate Editor (News)
Nick de Semlyen
020 7295 5437

Associate Editor (Re.View)
Chris Hewitt
020 7295 5354

Editor-At-Large
Helen O'Hara

COPY
Associate Editor (Production)
Liz Beardsworth
020 7295 8543

ONLINE
Editor-In-Chief (Digital)
James Dyer
020 7295 8558

Online Staff Writer
Phil de Semlyen
020 7295 5352

Junior Online Writer
Emma Thrower
020 7295 8503

Junior Online Writer
John Nugent
020 7520 6519

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Simon Braund, Angie Errigo, Ian Freer, Will Lawrence, Ian Nathan, Kim Newman, David Parkinson, Nev Pierce, Adam Smith, Damon Wise

CONTRIBUTORS
Words: Neil Alcock, Simon Crook, Fred Dellar, Jimi Famurewa, Alex Godfrey, Ed Gross, Jim Hosking, Sali Hughes, James Jennings, Rob Leane, Andrew Lowry, Dorian Lynskey, Hamish MacBain, Tess Morris, Olly Richards, Alaida Ritchie, Anna Smith (ALS), James White, Owen Williams, Billy Zane. **Photography:** Damian Bennett, Leah Gallo. **Picture research:** Hannah Howard, Ruth Greatrex, Claire Sheldon. **Illustrations:** Tim Burton, Olly Gibbs, Peter Strain David Mahoney. **Subbing:** Willemijn Barker-Benfield, Kat Halstead, Lucy Williams

BAUER MEDIA
Chief Executive **Paul Keenan**
Group Managing Director **Rob Munro-Hall**
Managing Director – Sport & Entertainment **Patrick Horton**
Business Analyst **Natalie Talbot**
Managing Editor **Sophie Price**

MARKETING
Communications Director **Jess Blake** 0207-208 3424
Direct Marketing Executive **Frederique Campbell** 01733 468896
Senior Marketing Manager **Natalie Wilkins** 020-7208 3535
Marketing Manager **Ally Johnstone** 020-7859 8491
Direct Marketing Executive **Rebecca Lambert** 01733 468804
Newstrade Marketing Manager, Men's, Film & Music **Dave Clark** 020-7520 6465

PRODUCTION
Print Production Controller **Carl Lawrence** 01733-468858
Ad Production Controller **Katie Kerry** 01733-468878
ePublishing Production Director **Alan Kindell** 020-7859 8604

ADVERTISING
Group MD **Abby Carvosso**
PA to Group MD **Alison Meadley**
Head of Magazine Media **Clare Chamberlain**
Head of Magazine Brands **Rachel Flower**
Group Commerical Director **Simon Kilby**
Group Brand Director **Ethan Hall** 020 7295 5477
Head of Film **Sarah Clarke** 020 7295 3576
Film Account Director **Kat Ingram** 020 7295 8560
Regional Sales Manager **Katie Kendall** 020 7295 8560
Media Planner **Kerry Beasley** 020 7295 5410
Creative Solutions Director **Rick Williams** 020 7295 6741
Creative Solutions Art Director **Jonathan Creswell** 020 7295 6786
Regional Advertising **Katherine Brown** 0161 833 8639
Head Of Classified **Karen Gardiner** 01733 366434
Classified Sales Executive **Philip Nessfield** 01733 366370
Inserts Manager **Simon Buckenham** 020 7075 0812

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INTERNATIONAL & SYNDICATION
International Director **Susan Voss**

INTERNATIONAL EDITIONS
Tim Keen (Australia) tkeen@bauer-media.com.au
Khaldoun Qaddoura (Arabia) khaldoun@empire-arabia.com

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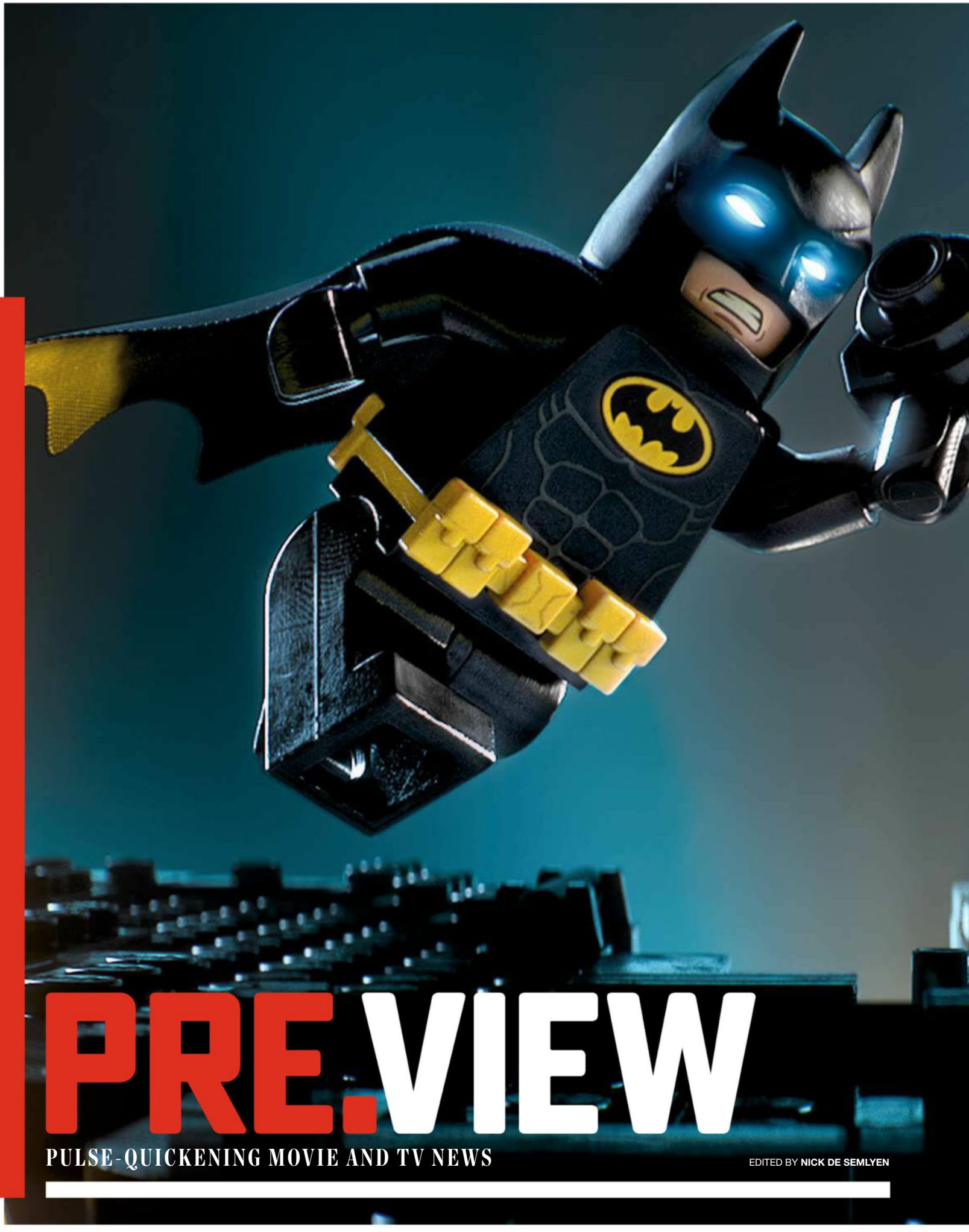
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PRE.VIEW

PULSE-QUICKENING MOVIE AND TV NEWS

EDITED BY **NICK DE SEMLYEN**



FIRST LOOK

THE LEGO BATMAN MOVIE

OUT **10 FEBRUARY, 2017**

GOTHAM'S TINIEST

Get ready for the rise of The Block Knight

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

THE NINTH SOLO Batman film is a little different from the ones that have come before. All the familiar elements are present and correct: Batcave, gadgets, industrial levels of angst. But this time the Caped Crusader (Will Arnett) is not only the guardian of Gotham City, but a choking hazard for young children. For this is *LEGO* Batman, getting his own spin-off after stealing the show in 2014's *The LEGO Movie*. Expect the silliest exploits since Adam West busted out the Shark-Repellent Bat Spray.

"Just the idea of Batman is absurd," chuckles director Chris McKay, such an ardent fan he has a Catwoman tattoo. "A guy who learns karate and dresses up at night to beat people up is ridiculous. We get a chance to affectionately comment on all that."

Batman's trusty butler will, of course, feature in the movie, voiced by Ralph Fiennes. "Ralph committed fully to LEGO Alfred," says McKay. "He told me he was inspired by [1935 high-society comedy] *Ruggles Of Red Gap*. It was amazing seeing him in the booth doing all this space work." The Joker (Zach Galifianakis) will be the primary villain, masterminding a scheme that may well involve small plastic blocks. "I wish I had a story about Zach sending us dead rats," laments McKay. "But he's an incredible Joker. I've listened to him riff with Will for hours."

The movie's main focus, however, is Batman's budding relationship with a dweeby fanboy named Robin. "Bruce Wayne accidentally adopts him at a party," McKay explains. "Robin is a *Book Of Mormon*-esque character, the ray of light to Batman's brooding, Lord Byronic hero. It's their dynamic that carries the movie, these polar opposites going head to head." You've seen *About A Boy*: prepare yourself for *About A Boy Wonder*.



13 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

WESTWORLD

Raise your consciousness with HBO's dark new sci-fi series

WORDS **JAMES WHITE**

1 The show is based on Michael Crichton's 1973 techno-thriller, in which a theme park full of robot cowboys goes awry. Executive producer JJ Abrams met with Crichton in the '90s about a possible film remake. That fell through, but Abrams kept pondering the concept's potential. Eventually he turned to Jonathan Nolan and Nolan's wife Lisa Joy to oversee this series for HBO. "There were more ideas to unpack than you had room for in a film," says Nolan, who has figured out a multi-season plan.

2 While it's still a Western/sci-fi mash-up, don't expect this to hit the same beats as the '73 film. "I've always felt in adaptation you have to be a bit of a heretic," Nolan explains. "What we keep is the brilliant, subversive idea of the set-up: what if there was a place you could go and act out your darkest fantasies with no consequence?" Hence Westworld's abundance of gun-down-able bandits and lusty sexbots. Forget a dude ranch. This is a dude *raunch*.

3 The series takes the idea of artificial intelligence becoming self-aware and explores it from the point of view of "hosts", creations built for the park that start to glitch. Westworld's AIs include a saloon-brothel madam (Thandie Newton) and a rancher's daughter (Evan Rachel Wood). "You see an awful lot of film and TV exploring how we'd think of them, but not enough about how they'd think of us," says Nolan. "In the film, the scariest people are the robots. For us, the scariest people are the guests."

4 The show's Western elements were inspired by Nolan's favourite example of the genre — Sergio Leone's *Once Upon A Time In The West*. *Westworld* even homages the 1968 Spaghetti epic, naming the park's central hub Sweetwater after one of its locations.

5 Another inspiration is video game *Grand Theft Auto*, in which players commit crimes with no consequences. "It's fully immersive, sandbox-style gaming," enthuses Nolan. "It's hilarious watching Lisa play, because she stops at the red lights and obeys traffic laws."

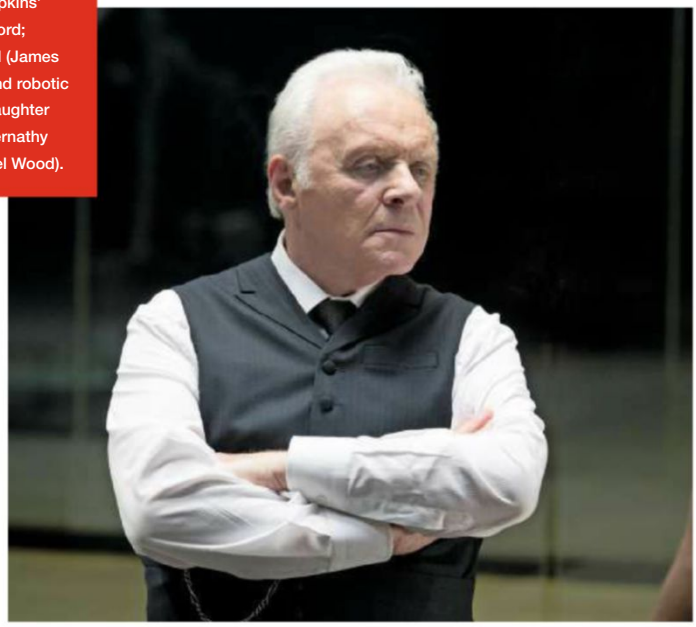
6 The most famous character from the film is Terminator-like gunslinger The Man In Black, portrayed by Yul Brynner. Here there's an inversion: The Man In Black (Ed Harris) is not robot but a chillingly amoral human. "He represents an expert-level player who has grown tired of the conventional experience," says Joy. "He's now looking for the bugs, the expert-level secrets hidden away within the narrative."





Clockwise from left: Gunslinger The Man In Black (Ed Harris); Human, not machine; AI brothel madam Meave Millay (Thandie Newton) and daughter; Anthony Hopkins' Dr Robert Ford; Teddy Flood (James Marsden) and robotic rancher's daughter Dolores Abernathy (Evan Rachel Wood).





7 Anthony Hopkins also stars as the park's mysterious creative director, Dr Robert Ford. According to the creators, Ford is a blend of legends. "Disney, Oppenheimer, Turing... All those Promethean figures," notes Nolan. "If you can get someone to play God, who better than Anthony Hopkins?" Morgan Freeman, don't answer that.

8 Hopkins relished playing a man with total power over his environment; Ford can even make a robot rattlesnake freeze with a wave of his hand. "The guy is a complete control freak," says the star. "These film companies always give me control freaks to play — I don't know why. Obviously there's one inside of me, screaming to get out!"

9 While most of the show was shot in California, the big vistas came courtesy of John Ford's old cine-stomping grounds in Utah. "I remember walking around one of the ranches and saying, 'Fuck it, we should make a Marlboro ad,'" laughs Nolan. "At which point my DP said, 'I've shot half a dozen right here...'"

10 If you've been waiting all your life for a plinky-plonky cover of Soundgarden's *Black Hole Sun*, get ready to get happy: the mechanical piano in Westworld's saloon plays old-timey versions of modern-day tunes. "Chris, my brother, is not a huge fan of contemporary music in his films, so I had a pent-up desire to do it," Nolan says. "This reminds the audience that this is a synthetic Western. It has a disorientating effect."

11 Rumours of trouble swirled when the series shut down production last year. But Nolan says there was a good reason. "It is more like a ten-hour movie than a TV series, so being able to write and produce simultaneously, which is the conventional way of doing TV, proved very difficult. The network gave us a chance to stop, write the remaining episodes, then shoot them all at once."

12 Nolan and Joy won't say yet whether Medievalworld and Romanworld, two other theme parks glimpsed in Crichton's film, will be part of the show. But Westworld is plenty big enough on its own. "If you're there with your family and want to hang out on a homestead, that's nice," says Nolan. "But if you get bored and push further out, the experience gets more intense. Geography dictates experience, and for that we needed the park to be truly massive. You imagine that no guest has ever gotten all the way to the edge."

13 The big question is whether *Westworld* will hit enough of a chord with viewers to become the new *Game Of Thrones*. Cast members promise a hell of a ride. "What you'll see is a real level of restraint as the show lays it all out and lets it simmer," says James Marsden, who plays Teddy. "Then, by episode ten, there is magma pouring out of your head as you watch."

***WESTWORLD* STARTS ON SKY ATLANTIC IN OCTOBER**

ON-SET EXCLUSIVE

THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE: SEASON 2

FROM **16 DECEMBER**

AXIS ALL AREAS

Up close with the villains of Amazon's alt-history thriller

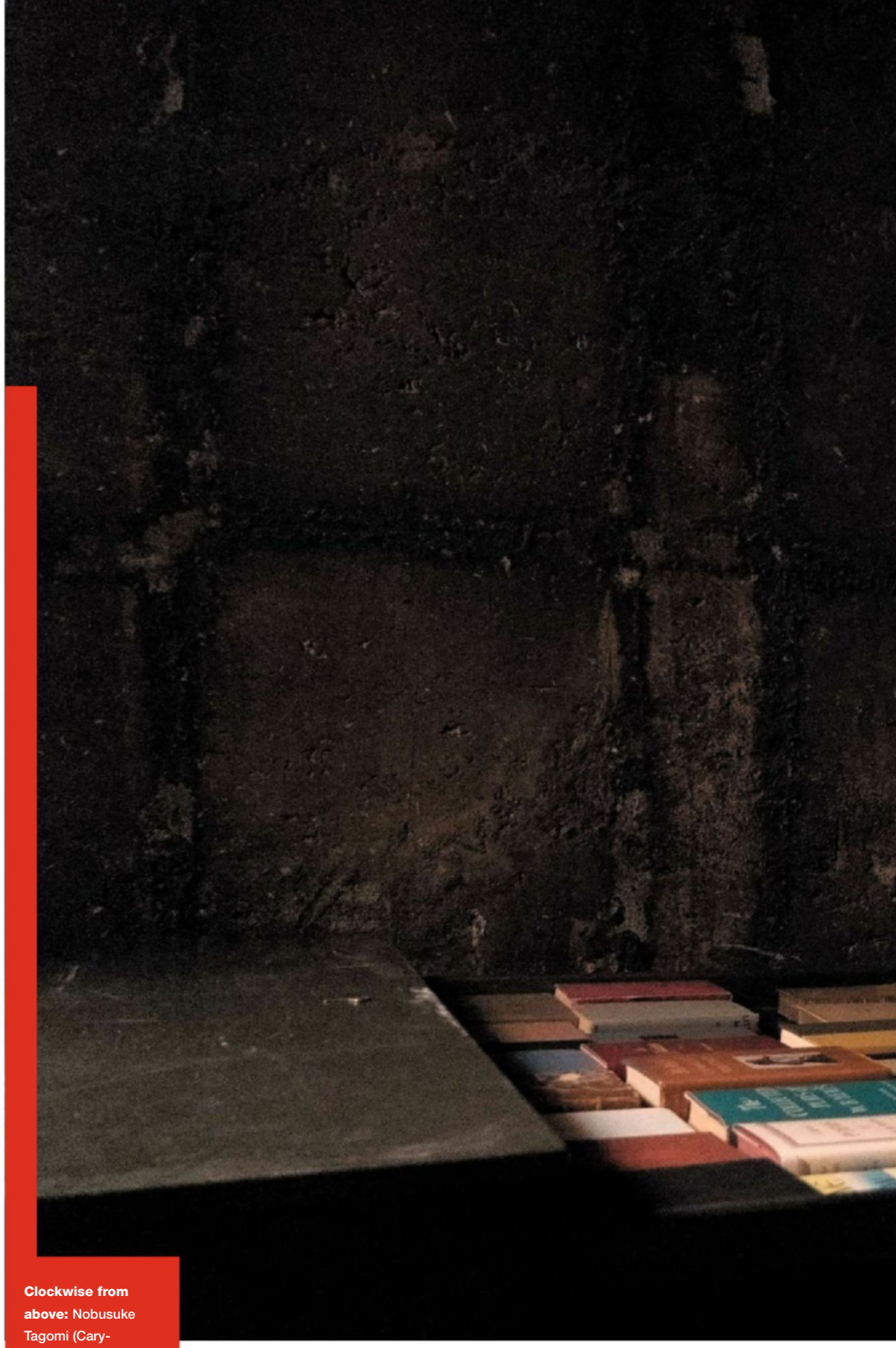
WORDS **ROB LEANE**

"WELCOME TO THE Nazi nibbles," grins Rufus Sewell. *Empire* is on location for Season 2 of *The Man In The High Castle*, the Amazon show that spins Philip K Dick's dystopian what-if-the-fascists-won-World-War-II novel to serial length. We expected sinister overlords; we didn't expect them to be tucking into sponge cake and dainty sarnies. Still, as the actors sit on the manicured lawn of Obergruppenführer John Smith (Sewell) in Nazi New York — actually a sleepy suburb in Vancouver — the tone is tense. This is due to the presence of Reich-resister Juliana Crain (Alexa Davalos), the show's heroine, who has ditched the comparative safety of Japan-controlled San Francisco to infiltrate the belly of the beast.

"Why is she here? What is going on? Is this reality? Is this alternative reality? Why is her hair that length?" teases Chelah Horsdal, who plays Smith's wife, Helen. "She's here for the cucumber and bratwurst sandwiches," chimes in Sewell, his spoiler-aversion tactics as polished as his uniform's buttons. "She's trying to prevent a great disaster," says executive producer Daniel Percival, finally giving a straight answer. Before ruining it with, "But it's not as simple as that."

Season 1 ended with a big twist: Japanese politician Nobusuke Tagomi (Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa) found himself in an alternative 1962, where the Allies won the war. The new episodes will see Tagomi hop between parallel dimensions, a plot thread Percival calls "very intimate". Meanwhile, Smith's Big Bad status is shaken by new developments. "The worldview he's hitched himself to in order to protect his family is about to devour one of his own children," hints Sewell.

Crain, meanwhile, is struggling to cope with life in the Nazi-controlled Big Apple. "She's in a gilded cage and very much stuck there," Davalos explains. "There are the same life-and-death stakes, but now they're disguised by red roses and white tablecloths." While she tries to uncover a vast conspiracy without getting executed, at least there are Aryan edibles to enjoy.





Clockwise from above: Nobusuke Tagomi (Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa) peruses some volumes in an alternative 1962; Alexa Davalos as the show's heroine, Juliana Crain; Rufus Sewell's erratic SS officer Obergruppenführer John Smith (left); Camille Sullivan as Karen, leader of the Pacific States branch of the Resistance.









FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2

OUT **28 APRIL, 2017**

PUMPING UP THE VOLUME

The Guardians face their greatest test: family

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

WHAT AWAITS MARVEL'S band of cosmic scallywags in *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2*, the sequel to the 2014 smash hit? Well, for one thing, some serious bickering. "You're going to see these characters having to endure the realities of being in a family," says Chris Pratt, whose blowhard hero Star-Lord will learn he's the son of an entity named Ego the Living Planet. "You're talking about a guy who's been longing to know who his father is for a long time. He'll discover if that person lives up to the expectations he has in his head."

When casting an actor to play a living planet, director James Gunn really only had one option: living legend Kurt Russell. "Hey, if you have to



cast *anything*, Kurt's a pretty good way to go," he nods. "He was actually not in my head initially, but one day Chris suggested him, and I would have been really disappointed if he'd said no." Gunn describes Ego as "an ancient cosmic being who has been on the edges of the universe for aeons by himself". In the comics, he's planet-sized; in the film he'll look like a regular person, having reformed himself out of humanoid parts. Still, as his name suggests, he's got enough self-regard to power a solar system. "I have a penis," he declares in a scene shown at Comic-Con. "It's not bad either." Talk about a teaser.

Meanwhile, sisters Gamora (Zoe Saldana) and Nebula (Karen Gillan) will thrash out their issues. Which, given they're the offspring of Ribena-coloured space-tyrant Thanos, are considerable. "What's it like to be a daughter of Thanos? In a word: brutal," grins Gillan. "We're going to get into the depth of their relationship. Ironically, Zoe really is like my big sister. I was trying to strangle someone and she said, 'Hold. This is how you do it.' She teaches me how to look cool in physical situations."

This being a Marvel mega-movie, there are plenty of baddie issues to go with the daddy issues. The Guardians have taken down Ronan the Accuser and his Sakaaran army, becoming in-demand mercenaries in the process, but Star-Lord, Gamora, Drax (Dave Bautista), Rocket (Bradley Cooper) and the newly tiny Groot (Vin Diesel) quickly manage to piss off a powerful alien called Ayesha (Elizabeth Debicki). "She's betrayed by the Guardians at the start of the movie and has her entire civilisation after them," says Gunn. Then there's the Ravagers, the band of pirates led by Yondu (Michael Rooker). "There's a mutiny and Taserface (Chris Sullivan) is a character that leads that," Gunn hints. "Yes, we know it's the dumbest name of all time."

Where the giant, tentacled astral-beast seen menacing our heroes in the concept art above comes in, we'll have to wait and see. Hopefully it won't call for help from its papa.

WATCH THE THRONE

Amma Asante is back with *A United Kingdom*

WORDS **PHIL DE SEMLYEN**



Top to bottom: Rosamund Pike and David Oyelowo; Director Amma Asante on location; The happy if controversial family.

"I LOVE MAKING people cry," laughs *A United Kingdom*'s really-not-remotely-sadistic director Amma Asante. "I sit in screenings listening out for the sniffs."

Her follow-up to the acclaimed *Belle* is another romance — one that will open this year's BFI London Film Festival (and probably quite a few tear ducts with it) on 5 October. With *A United Kingdom* her focus has shifted from the 1780s to the late 1940s, but racial intolerance lingers as Botswanan king Seretse Khama (David Oyelowo) woos English bank clerk Ruth Williams (Rosamund Pike). "He's isolated in this British world," expands Asante, "and she finds herself not accepted either by the white people of the Empire or Africans."

Opening her home town's biggest film festival is an honour fraught with emotions of its own. Asante lost her dad while making *Belle*, but he remained a guiding force for her new movie. "My parents were colonial children," she tells *Empire*, "so I grew up knowing what it meant to my dad to come from the first sub-Saharan country to win its independence. I couldn't help thinking of him in terms of this character Seretse." The project, brought to her by Oyelowo, had additional appeal. "There's definitely a sense of defying the odds in their story, which is personal to me."

Asante has defied plenty of odds. She made her filmmaking debut with *A Way Of Life* in 2004 (the film winning the UK Film Talent award at that year's LFF). Then... nothing. A series of projects were kiboshed by the credit crunch, before she revitalised her career with 2013's *Belle*. It caught the eye not just of Hollywood, but of a surprising new mentor. "Prince loved it," she explains. "He played at the afterparty, we spoke on the phone and then he flew me to Paisley Park. He didn't have to support me in the way he went on to do, but that was a measure of the man."

In the spirit of His Purpleness, Asante has a mentoring scheme planned. She's letting two aspiring female filmmakers shadow her on her next film. Whisper quietly, but it looks like it will be wartime romance *Where Hands Touch* — a project she's been trying to make for a decade. Right now, anything seems possible. The first female filmmaker of colour to open the London Film Festival and now a member of the Academy, Asante is a trailblazer in an industry inching towards greater diversity. "I'd like next year's hashtag to be #OscarsSoInclusive," she says of this year's controversies. Don't be surprised to see it tagged to her own film come February.

***A UNITED KINGDOM* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 25 NOVEMBER AND WILL OPEN THE 60TH BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL: BFI.ORG.UK/LFF**







POWER UP

The familiar onesies reimagined for a darker, grittier outing.

Director Dean Israelite briefs us on his "grounded" *Power Rangers* reboot

WORDS **JAMES WHITE**

FIVE ACROBATICALLY GIFTED whippersnappers, clad in colour-coded onesies, fighting supervillains and monsters. While *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* made a splash back in 1993, it's now regarded as more than a little naff. Which makes director Dean Israelite all the more excited to reinvent it. "I grew up on it," the 31-year-old tells *Empire*, "and I have all the same questions other people have. How are we going to update this? How will it exist in the contemporary superhero cinema canon?"

Israelite's solution was to ditch the more ridiculous elements (corny jokes, men in lizard suits, the words "Mighty" and "Morphin"). "I've tried to add naturalism and a grounded nature," he says. "Everything is character-driven." *Power Rangers*' quintet (Naomi Scott, Becky G, RJ Cyler, Dacre Montgomery and Ludi Lin) must shake off their teen angst and don battle suits to take on alien Rita Repulsa (Elizabeth Banks). "We've made the suits practically with Weta Workshop," vaunts Israelite, "with new cutting-edge tech."

But the biggest draw is surely Bryan Cranston, who at the start of his career voiced *Power Rangers* baddies such as Snizard and Twin Man. Returning to play mentor Zordon, a mo-cap creation, he was so impressed by Israelite's gritty vision that he's compared it to Christopher Nolan's Batman movies. "Like everybody, he was sceptical," says the director. "But he saw a bunch of footage and got excited for the potential. I think it'll be a thrill for fans to see what we're doing with Zordon." If the man who once said, "I am the danger!" doesn't yell, "I am the Ranger!" at least once, we'll be distraught.

***POWER RANGERS* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 24 MARCH, 2017**

AGE OF DISCOVERY

Five essential facts about the new *Star Trek* TV show

WORDS **IAN FREER**



The show's hero ship, the USS Discovery.

1 — *Star Trek: Discovery* is set in the same timeline as the other *Trek* TV series, rather than the new movies. It will look and feel different to the latter. "We were looking for a new aesthetic," says showrunner Bryan Fuller. "We had to strike new ground that had *Star Trek* in its DNA at a fundamental level. It felt like a nice way to let the hardcore *Star Trek* audience know that I have their backs."

2 — In a break from the episodic nature of the previous series, Fuller says the story is designed to be consumed in one big binge-watch. "We are telling the story in a modern way, which allows us not to try to wrap up the tale in 42 minutes," he reveals. "We look at each season as a novel."

3 — The design of the USS Discovery is based on a piece of Ralph McQuarrie concept art that was created for unproduced film *Star Trek: Planet Of The Titans*. The ship's designation is NCC-1031 — the American date for Halloween.

4 — Like the '60s show, *Discovery* will reflect the zeitgeist and tumultuous political times. "We need to be explorers," suggests Fuller. "We need to expand. We need to heal. We need something like *Star Trek* to remind us to get our shit together."

5 — The show's title was partly inspired by a particular cinematic masterpiece. "I'm a massive Kubrick fan and the Discovery is from *2001 [A Space Odyssey]*," Fuller says. "And there's something so *Star Trek* about the word 'discovery'." There's just one unfortunate downside: soon after the announcement of the title, #STD started trending.

***STAR TREK: DISCOVERY* IS ON NETFLIX FROM JANUARY 2017**



Louis Theroux stands outside the Church Of Scientology HQ in Hollywood. **Below:** Theroux interviews Rob Alter (who plays Tom Cruise).



THETAN MESS

Louis Theroux braves the murky world of Scientology

WORDS **JOHN NUGENT**

FOR HIS FIRST cinema release, Louis Theroux has scored an impressive coup: Tom Cruise! Sort of. In *My Scientology Movie* — Theroux's attempt to unpick the mysterious billion-dollar religion founded by science-fiction writer L Ron Hubbard — the church's highest-profile member is in fact played by actor Rob Alter, hired by Theroux to re-enact scenes described by ex-Scientologists.

"Which makes sense when you think about it," Theroux explains. "He's the most famous actor in the world. In the same way that Scientology uses the profile of Tom Cruise to propagate its worldview, using the Hollywood system to generate interest, we're doing what they do. It's tantalising." The filmmakers did invite the real Tom Cruise to appear but, "He politely declined."

Theroux has been making documentaries for nearly two decades and has been a familiar fixture on the BBC ever since his *Weird Weekends* strand debuted in 1998. But it's taken him time to hop onto the big screen. "I've always harboured a dream of making a feature-length film," he says. "But we knew we couldn't simply do the same thing we do on TV. It had to be more ambitious. We needed to pick a subject worthy of the longer form, but also an approach that would allow it to feel justified."

He settled on the conceit of staged re-enactments, partly inspired by Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act Of Killing* but also out of necessity, as the notoriously secretive church refused requests for interviews. "Normally, I plunge in and go with the flow," says Theroux. "In this film, we're generating our own flow."

Happily, there's still room for Theroux's interviewing style, a trademark blend of shrewd intellect and disarming politeness. Here, it comes up against Scientology's ruthless PR machine, which counter-investigates anyone they perceive as an enemy. True to form, the church "frequently rebuffed" his team, and a rival, anti-Theroux film is apparently in the works. He doesn't seem concerned. "I've known for so long that this was the playbook of Scientology," Theroux chuckles. "I would have been more disappointed if that *hadn't* happened."

***MY SCIENTOLOGY MOVIE* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 7 OCTOBER. WATCH AN EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW SCREENING AT EMPIRE LIVE — VISIT EMPIRELIVE.COM FOR MORE DETAILS**


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SPACE MADNESS

Director Luc Besson returns to sci-fi with *Valerian And The City Of A Thousand Planets*

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

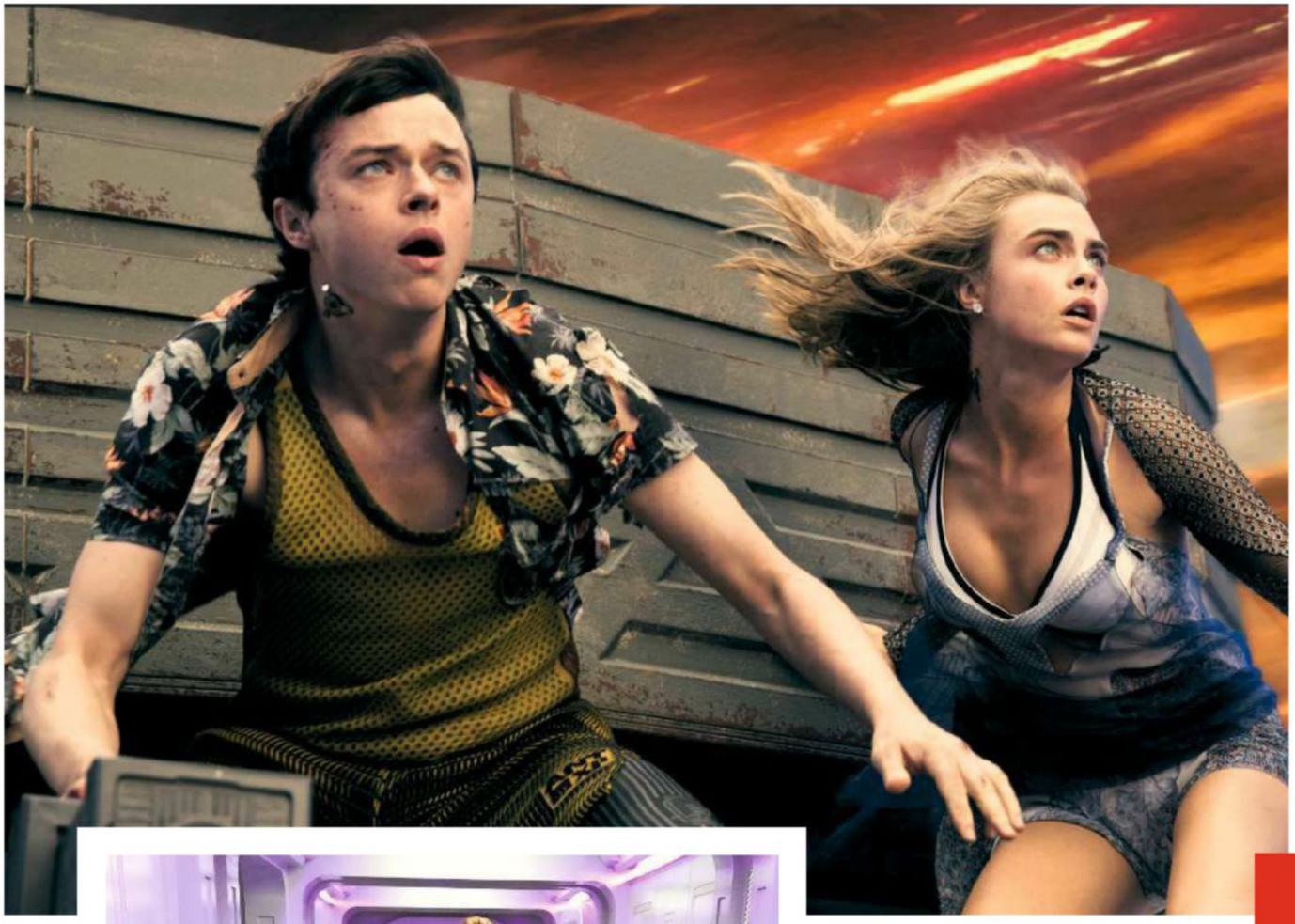
IN 1969, WHEN Luc Besson was just an *enfant*, he saw something that changed his life. Thumbing his way through a copy of *Pilote* magazine, he excitedly devoured the *Asterix* and *Tintin* cartoons. Then he got to something he'd never seen before: a comic strip called *Valérian And Laureline*, about a guy and a girl solving mysteries in space in the 28th century. "It was totally unusual," he remembers. "With Marvel there is always a superhero who is wondering if he should be a superhero, then a villain to fight. But this was very human, in a world which isn't human at all. As soon as I saw it, I got hooked."

Almost five decades later, the director behind *The Fifth Element*, *Leon* and *Lucy* is in post-production on a movie based on the property. *Valerian And The City Of A Thousand Planets* is both a passion project and the most ambitious thing he's ever attempted. The numbers are NASA-big. The film features not only a space station that is 12 miles long, but an astonishing 2,000 species of aliens. "*Fifth Element* was 188 effects shots; this is 2,734," reveals Besson. "It is quite enormous."

It nearly didn't happen at all. After hiring *Valérian* artist Jean-Claude Mézières to help design *The Fifth Element*, Besson wrote an adventure for the characters, but junked it after being wowed by James Cameron's own space opera, *Avatar*. Following a series of conversations with Cameron, he was ready to try again.

Pre-production was to last an exhaustive, and exhausting, five years. "I had 12 guys around the world, in contact only with me, all separately coming up with visuals," says Besson. "Every ten seconds we'd come up with a new idea." The process yielded such outré creatures as the KC02 (a bubble-based alien with mech limbs), the K-Trons (robot mercenaries) and — Besson's favourite — the Doghan Daguis. "They're three sneaky little guys whose brains are linked," he laughs. "They sell information, but each one says a different part of the line. It's a little *Monty Python*. I'm a bit in love with them."

A lot of thought also went into the various ecosystems found on Alpha, the space station on which most of the movie takes place. Beams of light function as highways to a gargantuan urban sprawl known as the Human Territories. "It's Broadway, Wall Street, Shibuya — everything in one," says Besson. "That's where you find Paradise





Clockwise from left: Dane DeHaan stars as interstellar secret agent Valerian in Luc Besson's new epic; Hawaiian-shirt-clad Valerian with his partner Laureline (Cara Delevingne); Laureline gets booted, suited and ready for action.

Island, the amusement park for adults. There are some strange elements to it: girls you don't know if they're aliens or not, or if they can transform into other things..." And things get *really* weird in the aqualands and gaslands, places that teem with gonzo jellyfish and even more peculiar creatures.

Stars Dane DeHaan and Cara Delevingne confirm that this is unfiltered Besson. "There's no Hollywood in this movie," says DeHaan, who in one sequence battles a monster while clad in a Hawaiian shirt. "It's Luc's thing and a total labour of love. There's a bunch of huge Steadicam shots, so much style, so much craziness." Both actors resorted to putting up location schematics and alien height charts in their dressing rooms, to keep the world straight in their heads. "Without imagination, you wouldn't be able to hack it after a while," Delevingne says. "It's so epic, with so many characters, but it's all driven by the story. It's the perfect mixture."

Taking place over one day in the life of the space-agent duo, the movie will also feature Ethan Hawke, as the aggressively guy-linered owner of a cabaret on Paradise Island, and Rihanna, whose role as a dancer in said cabaret may be more than it seems. "It's probably the most incredible character in the entire film, and I won't tell you anything," stonewalls Besson. "If I give up that, I will eat up half your pleasure." The rest of the cast-list keeps up the eclecticism we've come to expect from the filmmaker who cast Lee Evans as a stuttering star-sailor in *The Fifth Element*. Besides John Goodman and Clive Owen, *Valerian* will feature legendary jazz god Herbie Hancock in a bit-part. Fingers crossed we'll get to hear *Rockit* on a rocket.

After a six-month shoot at EuropaCorp studio in Paris, the film wrapped on 3 June. To celebrate, Besson thought up a prank that would doubtless have made his ten-year-old self hoot with glee. "I'm tricky," he grins. "The first take of the final shot was good, but I made them keep going while my plan was being prepped. Then I dropped 500 kilos of confetti on Cara and Dane. We were all crying. It was so emotional." That was followed by a faux-Oscar ceremony, in which every single member of the cast and crew received a gift-shop Academy Award. "Mine is covered in glowsticks, to make it galactic," says Delevingne. "That way every time I look at it I travel back to space-land in my mind." Can't wait to find out who won Best Three-Headed Alien In A Supporting Role.

***VALERIAN AND THE CITY OF A THOUSAND PLANETS* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 21 JULY, 2017**



Guy Ritchie talks in-between shots with Charlie Hunnam as King Arthur.

THE KING AND GUY

Charlie Hunnam on how he and Ritchie are bringing to life a whole new Arthur

WORDS **DAN JOLIN**

LIKE MANY KIDS with a robust imagination, Charlie Hunnam grew up "carving sticks into swords" and having imaginary duels down the local woods. Movies such as *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Excalibur*, he insists, gave him the "idea of becoming an actor". Especially the latter, John Boorman's operatic 1981 adaptation of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*. "I must have watched it 40 times over an 18-month period," says the Geordie star of *Pacific Rim* and *Sons Of Anarchy*. "It's a childhood dream come true to play King Arthur."

That said, Hunnam is the first to admit that, thanks to director Guy Ritchie, this take on the legendary monarch won't be someone you'll recognise from the Arthurian epics of yore. He's introduced in this origin yarn, subtitled *Legend Of The Sword*, as a ducking, diving Dark Ages rapscallion, raised on the mean streets of Londinium until, sword yanked out of stone, he realises his true, regal destiny and becomes embroiled in the black-magical machinations of Jude Law's bad-king Vortigern.

"We wanted to make an ignoble Arthur, at least at first," says Hunnam of the role. "We wanted him to feel contemporary, selfish, somewhat rough around the edges." It may feature sorcery and the occasional giant elephant, but Ritchie's fingerprints couldn't be more all over this. "I describe it to my friends as *Lord Of The Rings* meets *Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels*," Hunnam continues. "An unlikely marriage of two things, but it works. Guy really embraced the element of magical realism. He calls it 'fuck-dust'. He liberally sprinkled fuck-dust on the film. He's created a very rich, exciting world."

During the shoot, star and director totally hit it off, working out together and jujitsu-sparring at the weekends. But Hunnam admits to becoming riled by Ritchie's obsession with his physique during the audition process, when the filmmaker repeatedly asked him how much weight he'd put on for the role and how many fights he'd been in. Eventually, in the middle of an audition, Hunnam snapped. "I said, 'You know what? Fucking stop the camera. I'm starting to lose my temper. I know those other pricks you've got reading for this role [namely Henry Cavill and Michael Fassbender]. If you bring them in right now, I'll fucking fight them both at once for the role, and we'll see what's up with the physicality.' Guy said, 'Fucking hell, alright — calm down, mate.'"

But this was when Ritchie realised he'd made the right choice. Superman? Magneto? This Arthur would shit 'em. Less of the royal, more of the rumble.

***KING ARTHUR: LEGEND OF THE SWORD* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 24 MARCH, 2017**

THE QUOTE QUOTA

The month's most notable TV and movie *bon mots*

"YOU LOOK LIKE MATTHEW MODINE HAD A PEANUT ALLERGY."

PAULA (SARAH SILVERMAN)
IN *POPSTAR: NEVER STOP NEVER STOPPING*



"HERE I THOUGHT YOU WERE MICHELLE PFEIFFER FROM *DANGEROUS MINDS*, AND IT TURNS OUT YOU WERE MICHELLE PFEIFFER FROM *SCARFACE*."

MIKE STANGLE (ADAM DEVINE)
IN *MIKE AND DAVE NEED WEDDING DATES*



"I'M SORRY YOU MADE ME YELL AT YOU TODAY."

NEAL GAMBY (DANNY MCBRIDE)
IN *VICE PRINCIPALS*



"STUPID BATS, YOU'RE RUINING DATE NIGHT!"

HARLEY QUINN (MARGOT ROBBIE)
IN *SUICIDE SQUAD*



"THE HANDICAPPED – I WILL NOT LAUGH AT THEM. OR WITH THEM, JUST TO BE SURE."

DAVID BRENT (RICKY GERVAIS)
IN *DAVID BRENT: LIFE ON THE ROAD*



© MARVEL COMICS, INSTAGRAM



The character (formerly Ms Marvel) from the current *Captain Marvel* comic. **Below:** Brie Larson reading up on her iconic role.



THE CAPTAIN MARVEL FILES

Need-to-know intel on the latest hero in the MCU

WORDS **HELEN O'HARA**

WHO IS CAPTAIN MARVEL? __ It's a title used by numerous characters (including, confusingly, the DC hero also known as Shazam). But the new film focuses on former Ms Marvel Carol Danvers, a US Air Force pilot who gained superpowers after the explosion of a device built by the alien Kree.

CAROL LIKE A GIRL?! __ Yes, Marvel's first female solo lead — unless they rush out a Black Widow movie. Danvers obtains the powers of flight, super-strength and speed, plus the ability to absorb and project energy. She can go toe-to-toe with any Avenger (most recently scrapping with Iron Man in comic-book crossover *Civil War II*). Imagine Chuck Yeager with better hair.

WHO'S PLAYING THE ROLE? __ Last year's Best Actress Oscar-winner Brie Larson, who was rumoured back in June and confirmed onstage at Comic-Con in July. She immediately changed her Twitter bio to include, "Captain Marvel/Generally Stoked". It's her second comic-book role, after Envy Adams in *Scott Pilgrim Vs The World*.

AND THE DIRECTOR? __ Marvel chief Kevin Feige has hinted they're looking for a female director. *Doctor Who* director Rachel Talalay is one name bandied about, but *The Babadook*'s Jennifer Kent and *Whale Rider*'s Niki Caro are also rumoured. Whoever gets the job will be working from a script by Meg LeFauve (*Inside Out*) and Nicole Perlman (*Guardians Of The Galaxy*).

WHEN WILL WE SEE THE FILM? __ The release date is still over two years away. But it seems likely we'll get a first look at Captain Marvel in *Avengers: Infinity War* in April 2018.

***CAPTAIN MARVEL* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 8 MARCH, 2019**



SWISS ARMY DAN

How Daniel Radcliffe became a multi-purpose movie star

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**





Main: Radcliffe playing dead as cadaver Manny in Swiss Army Man. **Left and above:** As idealistic young FBI agent Nate Foster in Imperium.

SINCE HANGING UP Harry Potter's wand in 2011, Daniel Radcliffe has demonstrated a voracious appetite for variety. In the past 18 months alone, the 27-year-old has bounced from theatre (off-Broadway play *Privacy*) to TV (BBC *Grand Theft Auto* origin story, *The Gamechangers*). He's also found time to fit in an impressively diverse indie double bill. *Swiss Army Man* hooked him from the first page of the script. "All I knew was that Paul Dano was on board, and the logline," he says. "Which was something like, 'A suicidal man finds a corpse and they go on a magical journey together.'"

With Dano on board as the suicidal man, Hank, that left Radcliffe with the role of the corpse, Manny, who comes back to life (of sorts) and displays an array of astonishing abilities (farting that allows him to cross water as if on a jet ski! A karate chop that can fell trees! An erection that acts as a GPS!).

"Everything about it shouldn't work," laughs Radcliffe of the film, which was directed by music-video vets Dan Kwan and Daniel Scheinert. "That's what was so exciting. You shouldn't be able to be this sweet and this gross and this stupid and this clever, all at the same time."

As Manny, Radcliffe faced some of the most profound challenges of his career. He had to convincingly play dead ("I'm very proud of my ability to fall over and be still"), make his face do funny things ("I can now lower the top lid of my left eye"), and cope with having a broomstick shoved through his trousers to act as a stand-in stiffy. "My one bit of advice was that it wasn't quite the right shape," he recalls. "There's no other way of saying it — it didn't have a bell-end."

Radcliffe also stars in this month's thriller *Imperium*, as an FBI agent who infiltrates a group of white supremacists. "It was a very depressing film to do research on," he admits. "But the thing I loved was how smart this character was. Usually a character is smart but they get to the final third and go, 'Fuck it, give him a gun.' There was something really exciting about reading a script that didn't do that."

Post-Potter, he's been in blockbusters — *Now You See Me 2*, for instance — but hasn't actively pursued them. "I don't have any desire to be as famous as I was for *Harry Potter*," he says. "My goal is to become an actor who works a lot and does interesting work." If it gets any more interesting than a parping corpse with a hard-on, we're in for a treat.

***IMPERIUM* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 23 SEPTEMBER. *SWISS ARMY MAN* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 30 SEPTEMBER; WATCH AN EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW SCREENING AT EMPIRE LIVE — VISIT EMPIRELIVE.COM FOR MORE DETAILS**

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Every little helps

THE DEBATE

IS THE NOSTALGIA FACTOR OVERUSED?

We look back at the past to see if there is a future or if it's gone beyond its sell-by date





YES

JONATHAN PILE
DEPUTY EDITOR

THERE'S A POPULAR narrative currently doing the rounds in the *Empire* office (mostly peddled by James Dyer), and it's this: that I didn't like Netflix's *Stranger Things*. While it's true I didn't think it was perfect, I watched all eight episodes in a weekend, gave it three stars (still a recommendation) in the last issue and enjoyed the majority of the '80s-style trappings, right down to the girl who looks like 1986 Wil Wheaton.

But, for me, that nostalgia overload didn't mask the show's failings —most notably that it blew its mysteries too early, so by the time the characters worked out what was going on, we'd known for a couple of episodes or more. Whatever twists or surprises it had didn't have the impact they should have done. Strip away those crowd-pleasing nods to *It*, *E.T.* and *Poltergeist*, and that would have been far more apparent.

So it's not that nostalgia is a bad thing — I watched *Stranger Things* at the earliest possible opportunity *because* of its setting — it's just that I don't think it should be used as a get-out clause to disguise flaws.

We're currently being bombarded with films and TV series playing on nostalgia — *Ghostbusters*, *Jurassic World*, *Star Wars* — but some do it much better than others. It's the difference between C-3PO's appearance in *The Force Awakens* (intriguing red arm) and in *The Phantom Menace* (turned out he'd been made by Darth Vader for some reason). And the best bits of the new *Ghostbusters* were when it did something different (Chris Hemsworth's Kevin) rather than recycling from the originals (Stay Puft, the endless cameos).

Perhaps the best recent example of a film doing it right is *Creed*. It had a strong central story and character, and was then enhanced by nods to the *Rocky* franchise, but never allowed to be sidetracked by them. But then there's its polar opposite: *Terminator Genisys*. A film that played with the series' history to franchise-harming effect — *Terminator 3*'s star-shaped sunglasses have nothing on this. Arnold Schwarzenegger's once-iconic machine was reduced to a punchline. And a punchline nicknamed 'Pops' at that.

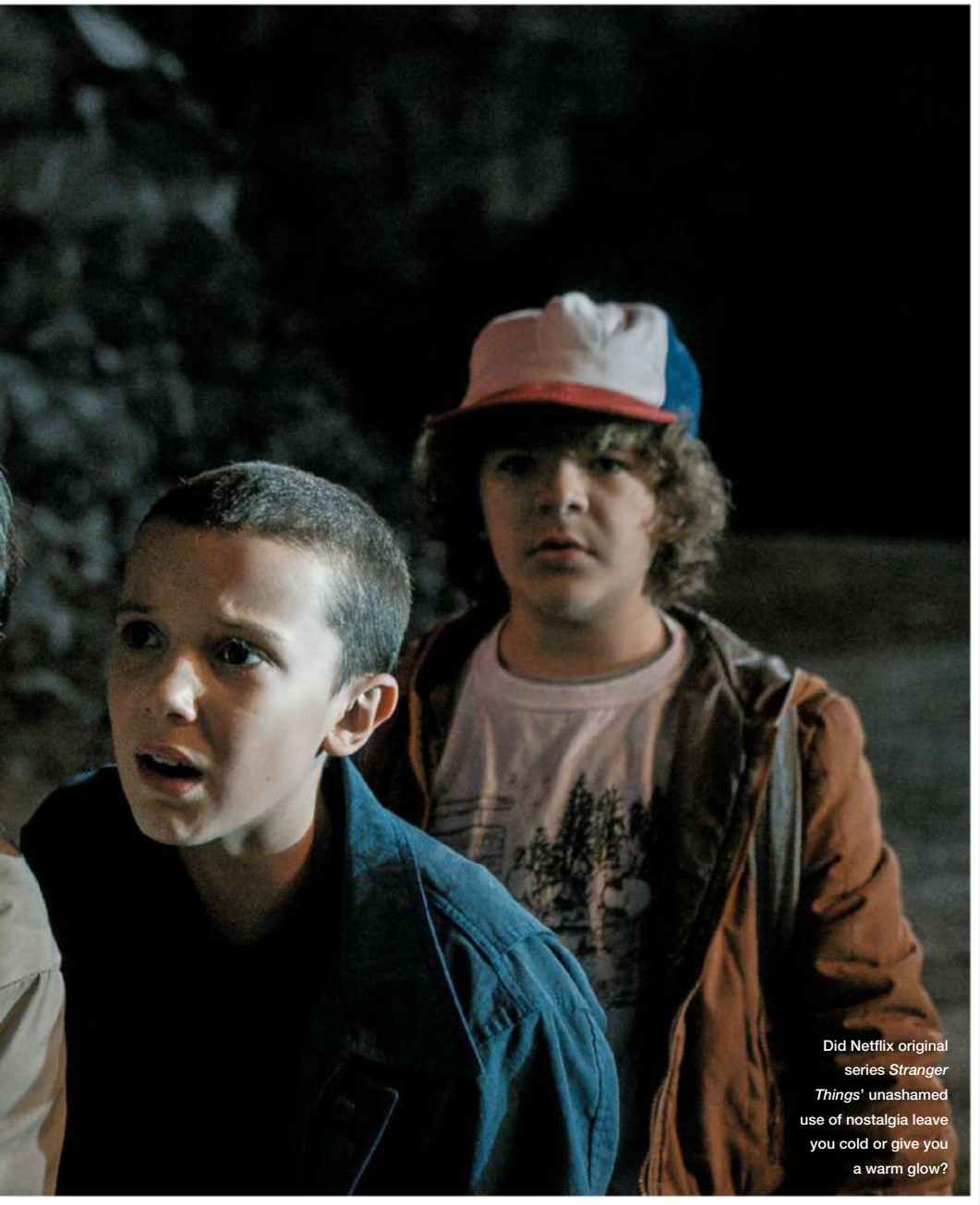
So yes, filmmakers should use nostalgia, but they're obsessed with it to the extent George Lucas was obsessed with CGI in the prequels. If they used it sparingly but to better effect, then it would be something to be celebrated again.



NO

JAMES DYER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF (DIGITAL)

SNEERING AT NOSTALGIA is, appropriately, not a recent phenomenon. The term was coined back in the 17th century to describe a mental illness. This mysterious affliction was, one Swiss physician decreed,



Did Netflix original series *Stranger Things*' unashamed use of nostalgia leave you cold or give you a warm glow?

a malady of the mind responsible for droves of soldiers fleeing the battlefield. Nowadays, nostalgia is held in higher regard — not to mention being far less likely to get you shot for cowardice. It's the cockle-warming glow that reminds us of good times past; a friendly face in a room full of strangers. Not a curmudgeon's rejection of the new, but a heartfelt celebration of the comfortingly familiar.

Nowhere has this been more evident of late than in the Duffer Brothers' love letter to the 1980s, *Stranger Things*. For eight glorious episodes we are transported back to our childhoods, when adventures were excellent, happiness was a tricked-out (preferably airborne) BMX, and Goonies never said die. From the moment the synth-happy theme plays over a VHS-era typeface (it's a modified version of Benguiat, in case you were wondering), *Stranger Things* is a perfect example of nostalgia done right. Not tentatively or obliquely, but wholeheartedly and without apology.

Confusing this kind of loving tribute with Hollywood's current reboot habit is a mistake. These endless retreads aren't nostalgia at all — they're the opposite. Does anyone really believe last year's *Point Break* was a misty-eyed paean to the golden summer of 1991? Of course not. It was a greedy attempt to cash in on past glory, while exposing financiers to minimal risk. Ditto the new *Ghostbusters* — regardless of the genuinely decent film it became. These throwbacks are, for the most part, the stuff of modern cynicism, rather than a wistful longing for the halcyon days.

The problem, you see, is not that nostalgia is overused; it's that it isn't used enough. Disposable cameos and winking asides might tick a box on some studio exec's spreadsheet, but such half-arsed tokenism misses the point entirely. True nostalgia comes from the heart, not the wallet. It's a gift: the last Rolo from a filmmaker whose love for another place and time runs as deep as our own.

Nostalgia is a touchstone. It reminds us that, no matter how bad things might seem in the here and now, once upon a time everything was okay. And someday it will be again. In the Trump/Brexit-inspired Upside Down in which we now find ourselves, what could possibly be more important than that?

PRODUCTION NOTES

Movies and TV shows in the works



1_

A second solo movie for Superman is reportedly underway, with Henry Cavill set to return as the Strongman of Smallville. Before then, he needs to be resurrected and save the Earth in next year's *Justice League*.



2_

She's cameoed on *Sesame Street* and *The Simpsons*, but Natalie Portman has just signed up for her first proper TV role. HBO's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* is about a student with a missing twin sister.



3_

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, the Steve Martin/Michael Caine con-men caper, is getting a gender-flip remake, with Rebel Wilson attached to the Martin role. Her co-star is TBC; we're hoping for Caine in a wig.



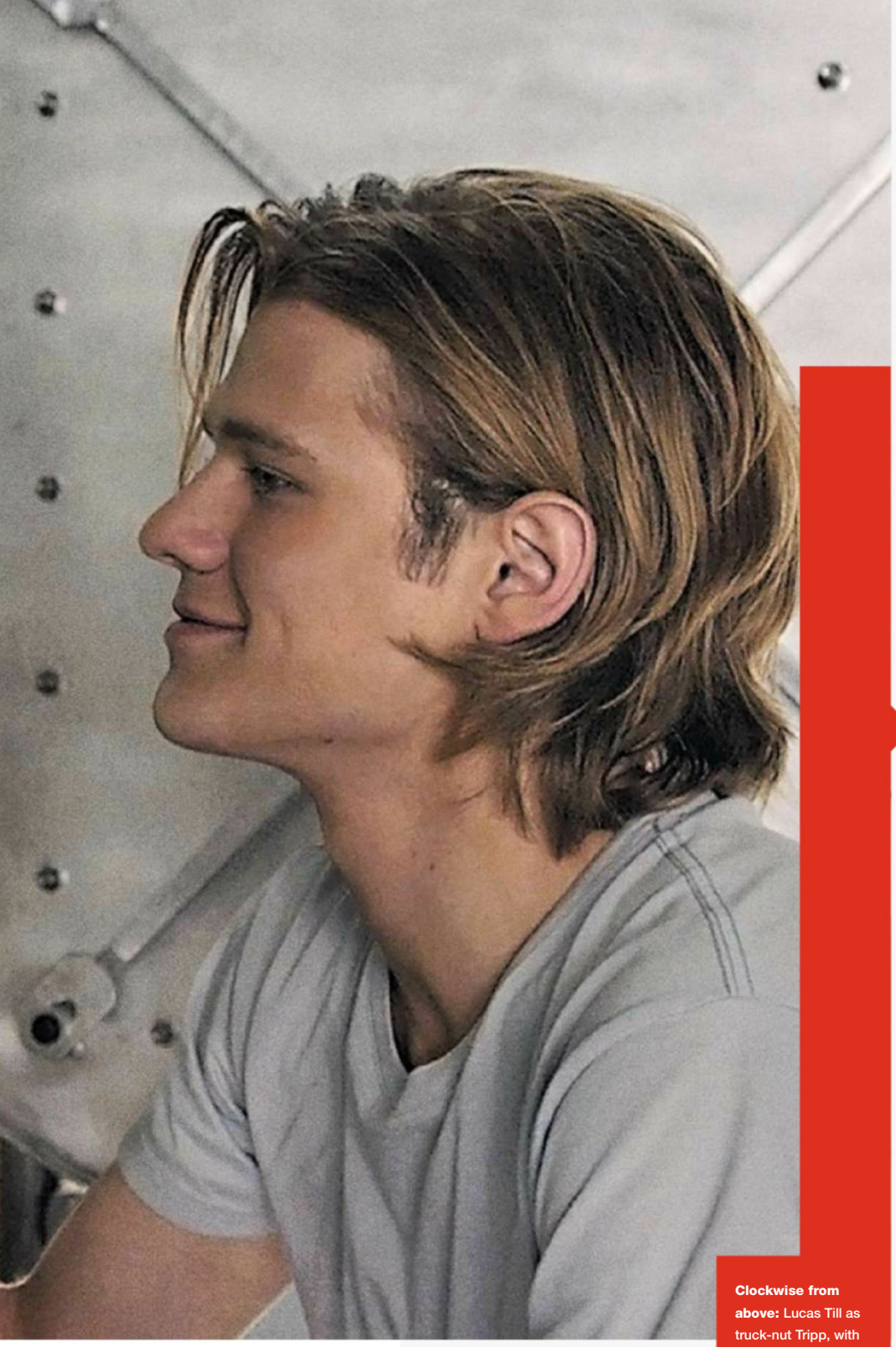
4_

Bradley Cooper is reuniting with *The Hangover* director Todd Phillips to executive-produce an HBO mini-series. Don't expect boozy japes — it's based on Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Black Flags: The Rise Of ISIS*.











Clockwise from above: Lucas Till as truck-nut Tripp, with his extra-terrestrial engine; Till and director Chris Wedge talk specs; The monster vehicles show off their skills; The three-point turn would take practice.

ON-SET EXCLUSIVE

MONSTER TRUCKS

OUT **3 FEBRUARY, 2017**

FREE WHEELIE

The alien-truck action movie you didn't know you wanted

WORDS **SIMON CROOK**

GIVEN THE TITLE, you might expect hulking vehicles with moon-sized tyres and hordes of howling blokes. *Monster Trucks*, however, is a much more surreal prospect, featuring a monster *in* a truck. Chris Wedge (*Ice Age*) is the director behind the $100 million action-comedy, which sees an oil-drilling accident unearth a species of subterranean alien — one which escapes into a Midwest town and under the hood of a vehicle owned by Tripp (Lucas Till). Cue creature merging with machine, an inter-species buddy-up and a race to get the beast back underground. It's basically 'ET: The Extra-Tyre-Estrial', or *Free Willy* on wheels.

Yet it was another movie that proved the inspiration. "Chris gave me *Romancing The Stone* to watch," says Till between takes in Surrey, Vancouver, goggles round his neck from shooting what can only be described as an extreme welding montage. Wedge's aim is to blend high-tech spectacle with a 1980s vintage spirit. Hence the retro support: Rob Lowe as an evil oil mogul, Danny Glover as a grouchy scrapyard owner.

As for the hero truck, *Empire* is taken over to meet the 1956 C Series pickup, customised by Andy Smith (the man who built *The Dark Knight*'s Tumbler) into an imposing FrankenDodge. When a member of the FX team picks up a joystick, the 14-foot-long brute sparks into life. It lurches, bends, tips, shrinks, stands up on three tyres and at one point appears to start twerking. It's like watching a car doing dressage.

"Imagine *Fast And Furious* with trucks; action-wise, that's where we're at," says Wedge as his Dodge trots back to its garage. "We're three weeks into the shoot and we've already ruined every car we've been given." After the crunching practical stunts are completed, they'll focus on perfecting the digital beast within. "The design references a load of animals," explains VFX supervisor Kurt Williams. "A bit of elephant seal, a bit of eel, a bit of octopus..." Which sounds unique, if hard to picture. "You know," adds Till, helpfully, "just like a squid-whale." Squid-whales. Cars. Sold.



FIRE AWAY

It's about to kick off in Ben Wheatley's *Free Fire*

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**

I DON'T GET USED to this. This is the calm before the storm. The scene pictured above is one of the few moments of respite before the bullets start flying and bodies start piling up in Ben Wheatley's *Free Fire*.

The sixth movie from the Brit director is a brutal, blackly comedic thriller, closer to *Reservoir Dogs* than the cold complexity of *High-Rise*. In Boston in 1978 (partially chosen because Wheatley loves the period; partially to take mobile phones out of the equation), two groups of people meet in a dilapidated warehouse to negotiate an arms sale. On one side, a couple of Irish Republicans (Cillian Murphy and Michael Smiley). On another, a band of skittish arms dealers, including Sharlto Copley's Vernon and hired muscle Ord (Armie Hammer). "And I'm the middleman — or the middlewoman — between all these people," says Brie Larson, who plays the mysterious Justine. "I'm the girl in a sea of various-shaped men, with all the 'taches. I lobbied for a 'tache, too, because it felt weird that I was the only one without one."

When the deal goes sour, all that facial hair is scrunched up in anger, guns are drawn and everyone — and we do mean everyone — finds themselves on the wrong end of a bullet. From that moment on, *Free Fire* turns into a down-and-dirty battle for survival, as the walking wounded (including Jack Reynor, Noah Taylor, Enzo Cilenti, Babou Ceesay and Sam Riley) try to find a way out that doesn't involve the coroner. "It's not about good and evil," says Copley. "Though these are not guys you would want your daughter to be dating. And you wouldn't want the girl in the movie to be your daughter!"



Although *Free Fire* was shot last summer (with a Brighton warehouse doubling for Boston), it's been held back to put more distance between it and *High-Rise* (though it'll close this year's London Film Festival on 16 October). In the interim, what with her Oscar for *Room* and the

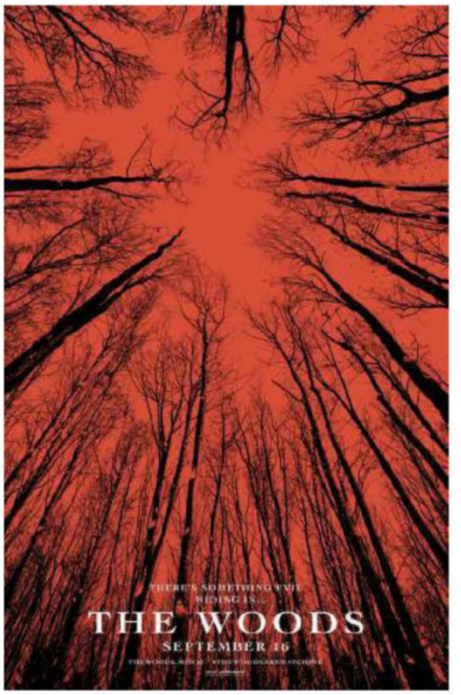


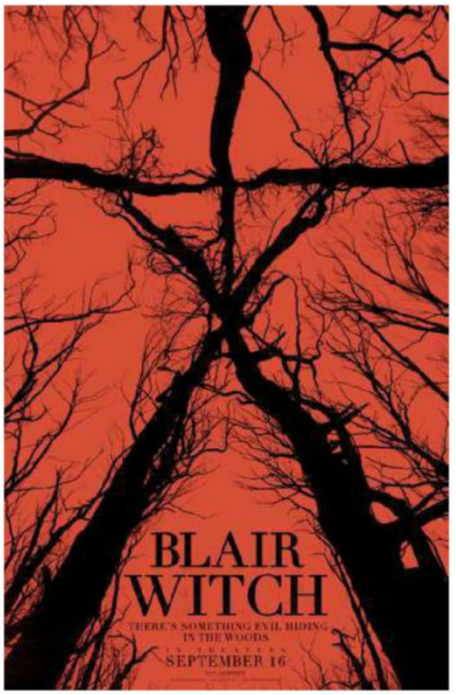
Babou Ceesay, Brie Larson, Armie Hammer, Sharlto Copley and Noah Taylor just before shit gets real. **Below:** Ben Wheatley.

news she's been cast as Captain Marvel (see p.27), it's suddenly shifted from being 'the new Ben Wheatley movie that happens to star Brie Larson' to 'THE NEW BRIE LARSON FILM'. As if having Martin Scorsese on board as executive producer wasn't already a big-enough deal.

Larson, who replaced Olivia Wilde just weeks before shooting began, was lured by the chance to do something different. Namely, spend much of a shoot crawling around on a rocky floor. "I don't think any of us knew there would be debris on the ground," she told *Empire* on set, showing off a pair of welts on her arm. "Mentally I'm fine, but my body has taken its toll. I'm deeply bruised. We're all pretty beat up." Expect a big body count. Expect pitch-black humour. Expect Wheatley's biggest film to date.

***FREE FIRE* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 31 MARCH, 2017**







Clockwise from top left: The fake poster for *The Woods* and the final *Blair Witch* poster — spot the stick man; the cast of *Blair Witch*, unaware that they are in the real deal.

OUT OF THE WOODS

How Adam Wingard shocked the world with a surprise *Blair Witch* sequel

WORDS **SIMON CROOK**

UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN standing in a corner staring at the wall for the past month, you'll know a *Blair Witch* sequel is about to drop. Disguised for more than a year as a movie called *The Woods*, but unveiled at this year's Comic-Con, Adam Wingard's latest film is the result of an elaborate cover-up that would put the CIA to shame. Get this: the director's been brewing the Lionsgate project since 2011. "Honestly, I feel like a weight's been lifted — it's been five years of paranoia!" laughs Wingard from the Vancouver set of his next movie, *Death Note*. "I'm *still* having trouble saying *Blair Witch* out loud, but weirdly we've been hiding in plain sight all along."

It's true. A week before filming, website Bloody Disgusting insisted *The Woods* was a *Blair Witch* sequel. ("Hilariously, everyone thought they were full of shit," says Wingard.) And in hindsight, it's clear that the fake poster for *The Woods* features a hidden outline of the infamous stick man. "People have been staring at it like a magic-eye painting since then," the director chuckles. So why the secrecy? "Partly to avoid a fan backlash, but it's more a call-back to the original's is-it-real marketing campaign. It's a bit of fun, but there's a thematic synergy."

Set 15 years after the original, the movie was shot in 35 days, keeping the cast constantly rattled ("I had this collection of air horns — 'scare horns', I called them — that I'd fire off at any point to get a jolt") and none the wiser as to what it was. "They genuinely thought they were starring in a *Blair Witch* knock-off," he says. "During auditions, we had a phoney script full of ridiculous names. The Witch was called Kaw-wraith."

Even now there are secrets to uncover, with the sequel loaded with covert nods to the original. "It's packed with subliminals," Wingard confirms. "Here's a tip-off for *Empire* readers: look out for the original 16mm camera used in the first film. It's hidden in there somewhere."

***BLAIR WITCH* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 15 SEPTEMBER AND IS REVIEWED ON P.38**

HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

JESSE EISENBERG

Does Lex Luthor love his lactose?

WORDS IAN FREER



Which character were you in your first school play?
I don't know who I played, but I remember my line of dialogue: "Tell me, little raindrops, is that the way you played?" It was probably some kind of avant-garde kindergarten show about nature.

Do you have a signature dish?
I blend raw garlic in a shake every single day. I know that's disgusting. I do a show every night [*The Spoils*] and I'm paranoid about getting sick, so I eat raw garlic all day.

Which movie have you seen the most?
I saw *Home Alone* probably seven times in the theatre. My sister and I had to trick seven different adults into chaperoning us, because no-one else would see that movie more than once.

Which is the last TV show you gave up on?
I don't really have ongoing shows that I watch. Now I'm in London, I watch basketball every night on these bootleg sites. I'm probably putting horrible things on my computer, but it's worth it.

When were you last naked outdoors?
I camped out on an island in the Caribbean, which sounds glamorous, but it was not. I built a tent on this island with a small group of people. There was a bathroom on an island a 20-minute kayak away, but the winds were bad that week, so we could never travel to what we'd call Bathroom Island. Our island became this hedonistic cesspool.

Do you have a nickname?
I used to play basketball growing up and they called me Wild Thing. I suspect it wasn't sarcastic, but you never know with kids.

Have you ever knowingly broken the law?
I have a friend who is a lawyer and — before iTunes — I burned him a CD of Tori Amos. I gave him the CD with "Tori Amos" written on with a Sharpie, and he broke it in front of me and threw it in the garbage because it was illegal.

What's the worst smell in the world?
I went to a Bat Mitzvah when I was 13 and bit into a glowstick. It tasted somewhere between cleaning fluid and battery acid. I had the smell of that poison on my fingers for what seemed like a year. If I were stuck in the woods and the only thing I had was a glowstick, I probably wouldn't crack it.

Have you ever written fan mail to anyone?
Yeah, I wrote [basketball player] Dan Majerle a letter telling him how depressed I was in 6th grade and how I had no friends.

How much is a pint of milk?
I don't know because I don't buy milk. My family is vegetarian and they buy almond milk or soya milk and the price varies per store. Two dollars?

On a scale of one to ten, how hairy is your arse?
Who answers stuff like that?

Danny DeVito did just last issue.
He's in his sixties, right? He is already in a place where you get comfortable with stuff like that.

Do you have a favourite joke?
When I was in third grade, my teacher Mr. Thomas said to this kid in class, "You know, Chris Irons, if I made a list of all the people who didn't do their homework, you'd be at the top." And Chris Irons said, "Do I get a prize?" I thought it was the funniest thing I'd ever heard. It was subversive, clever and sharp. It was calling attention to the silly rhetorical statement the teacher was saying. That was great.

CAFÉ SOCIETY IS IN CINEMAS FROM 2 SEPTEMBER AND IS REVIEWED ON P.44

MARTIN SCHOELLER / AUGUST

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ON.SCREEN

REVIEWS OF NEW FILMS, SHOWS AND GAMES ON EVERY SIZE OF SCREEN

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★ GOOD ★★★ OKAY ★★ POOR ★ AWFUL

EDITED BY **JONATHAN PILE**



Where was the goddamn turps?

BLAIR WITCH

★★★

OUT **15 SEPTEMBER**
CERT **TBC / 90 MINS**

DIRECTOR Adam Wingard
CAST James Allen McCune, Valorie Curry, Callie Hernandez, Brandon Scott, Wes Robinson, Corbin Reid

PLOT Determined to find his missing sister, a college student (and brother of *The Blair Witch Project*'s Heather) ropes his friends into going to search for her in the woods she disappeared in. It turns out, unsurprisingly, to be a very bad idea.

WEARABLE TECH IS a godsend. At least, it is for a certain type of filmmaker. A longstanding problem with found-footage films has been that, when the shit hits the fan (or the monster takes Manhattan), there's that nagging question — "Why are you still filming?" A close relative of, "Why the hell aren't you trying much harder to not die?"

There have been interesting attempts to solve the problem — most memorably with telekinesis in Josh Trank's pre-*Fantastic Four* super-powered calling card, *Chronicle* — but the ear-cams worn in this *Blair Witch* sequel, remarkably in the works for five years without anyone realising it was happening, are the best real-world answers we've yet had.

Set two decades after the first film (released in 1999, the original's footage was 'found' in 1994, while this is dated as 2014), it ignores the cash-grab sequel that quickly followed. Instead, this latest expedition into Maryland's Black Hills forest has family connections — lead character James (McCune) is the kid brother of *The Blair Witch Project*'s doomed documentarian Heather. His decision to look for her is motivated by his discovery of a shonky YouTube video he believes shows her alive. Roping in Peter and Lisa (Scott and Hernandez), two of his childhood friends, and Talia (Curry), a film student he has romantic designs on, they tool up (drones, GPS trackers and state-of-the-art cameras) and head out. First stop: Lane and Ashley (Robinson and Reid), the two Burkittsville locals who found and uploaded the footage. It's quickly — and reluctantly — agreed they will also be allowed to tag along, and then it's into the woods: we have our group of six (soon-to-be-unhappy) campers.

As soon as we're surrounded by trees — although, weirdly, it was clearly filmed in a different forest — director Adam Wingard, horror's latest hot-young-thing after the blackly comedic but thoroughly stomach-churning *You're Next*, begins to build the tension. Tales of supernatural goings-on are traded by the characters — including one about a hand reaching out of a river to snatch a child — while the backstory of Elly Kedward, the Blair Witch herself, is also revealed in more detail. Then there are the red herrings that suggest the haunting is about to begin — one character sets out alone to gather firewood before night falls, but returns without incident — which raise the anxiety levels before settling them down again. This delaying of the inevitable making the terror all the more effective when it finally does come.

But it's the sound design that stands out. Mini jolts of fear are earned by the timing of entirely innocuous noises — the burst of static from walkie talkies, or even the crunch of the amateur cuts between scenes. And full-body lurches are achieved when the supernatural events start for real. Would their equipment record it all so cleanly? Perhaps not, but quibbling would be a nit-pick too far when much of the horror — for the audience and the characters — relies on the monster remaining unseen, hidden in the woods, or the darkness, or most often both. It's crucial for making the film as successfully scary as it is.

Sadly, it can't be sustained — as the finale kicks in, the ebb and flow of terror and relief are lost and with them the film's power to frighten. It doesn't help that none of the kids have made much of an impression either way, so there's no real desire to see them survive, or to meet a suitably gruesome end. James is so bafflingly bland it's difficult to see why Talia is even remotely interested in him. Although exactly the same could be said of her. Then there's Peter, who's slightly angry, Ashley, who has purple hair and Lisa, who cuts her foot. Of course, to call all those personality traits would be stretching it. Only Lane, with his murky background and dubious motivations, has potential, but that plot thread is ultimately squandered in favour of running and screaming in the dark.

And then there's the spectre of the original — a genre-defining modern classic that crashed into 1999's US summer blockbuster season like a supernaturally uprooted tree, out-performing *The World Is Not Enough* and *Wild Wild West* when the final takings were totted up at the end of the year. It's a film that still resonates 17 years on. Scary in the moment, this latest *Blair Witch* will begin to fade by the time you're home from the cinema. **JONATHAN PILE**

VERDICT Effectively scary and occasionally inventive, *Blair Witch* is a solid genre film both helped and hindered by its franchise's place in cinematic history.



Subtlety wasn't his greatest attribute.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

★★★★

OUT **9 SEPTEMBER**
CERT **15** / **119 MINS**

DIRECTOR Matt Ross
CAST Viggo Mortensen, Frank Langella, George McKay, Kathryn Hahn, Steve Zahn

PLOT Ben (Mortensen) and his wife abandoned modern life to raise their six children deep in the woods, teaching them high-minded ideals, intellectual theories and wilderness living. But when she dies, the family venture into the wider world to attend her funeral.

CINEMA OFTEN TAKES a hard line on those who reject society for a simpler existence. Most often, they're portrayed as weirdos, possibly murderers, who eke out a living deep in the woods surrounded by firearms, and probably inbreeding. Then there are the action heroes who retreat to a rustic cabin in search of peace, only to be called back for one last job. But it's rare to see a film sympathetic to the sort of hippie idealist who tries to forge a new Eden, despite everything — and this thoughtful indie film examines how such a man might cope when his great project is threatened.

Viggo Mortensen, who seems only loosely tied to modern life at the best of times, plays the high-minded dreamer who takes his family into the woods and raises his kids in their own personal idyll. They hunt game, race up mountains for exercise and gather around the campfire to read each evening: George Eliot for the little ones, quantum physics for the teens. Their life looks dreamy, shot with sunbeams slanting through the trees of an apparently virgin forest. The children — led by George McKay as eldest son Bo — are strong, healthy and extraordinarily knowledgeable about all manner of esoteric subjects, but they have no real understanding of the outside world. While Ben inspires and drives his family, he is yet to realise that he is also limiting their experience.

When Ben takes his brood across country to their mother's funeral, despite the warnings of his father-in-law Jack (Langella), who blames him for his daughter's death, to stay away, it's an eye-opening journey of discovery for the kids. For Ben, however, it's a huge risk. He fears for the purity of mind he has sought to instil in them amid the world's temptations, and for his own continued custody of them when Jack attacks their unconventional way of life.

It's a fairly simple plot but Matt Ross' debut film is so dense with metaphor that you can read it on any of a number of levels. It's an engaging road movie about an eccentric clan discovering the wider world, with some beautifully played fish-out-of-water commentary — not always at the expense of the mountain family. It's also a sharp portrayal of modern life and its hypocrisies and limitations; the outsider perspective of these sheltered kids venturing down the mountain in contrast with their video-game obsessed cousins. There's arguably a discussion of American values too, contrasting Ben's frontier ideals with the consumerist gleam beyond his woods. And this is a thoughtful examination of the fragility of any idyll under pressure from the imperfect world outside.

But all of it is anchored and, like the family itself, dominated by Mortensen's Ben, who's both the hero and the villain. Caring but dictatorial, idealistic but often blind, he's a fascinating figure and, in bringing him to life, Mortensen gives his best performance yet. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT A fiercely original, pleasantly unpredictable character piece. This is a gang of outsiders with something valuable to say about the world we live in.



SOUR GRAPES

★★★★

OUT **16 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **15** / **85 MINS**
DIRECTORS Jerry Rothwell, Reuben Atlas
CAST Arthur Sarkissian, Jef Levy, Rudy Kurniawan (archive)

WITH WINE, YOU don't always get what you pay for. Which is annoying but acceptable at £7.99 — less so if you're paying thousands. Case in point: this documentary on the eye-wateringly expensive world of high-end and vintage wine auctions. *Sour Grapes* reveals the astonishing story of Rudy Kurniawan — a mysterious yet ludicrously wealthy young man who appeared on the American wine-collecting circuit in the early noughties, and subsequently duped Hollywood's rich and famous into dropping a mansion's mortgage on his kitchen-made vino, leaving up to 40,000 "fake" bottles in his wake. Though it takes a while to get going, this doc is full of flavour, allowing a peek inside an elite world most will never experience. **AW**

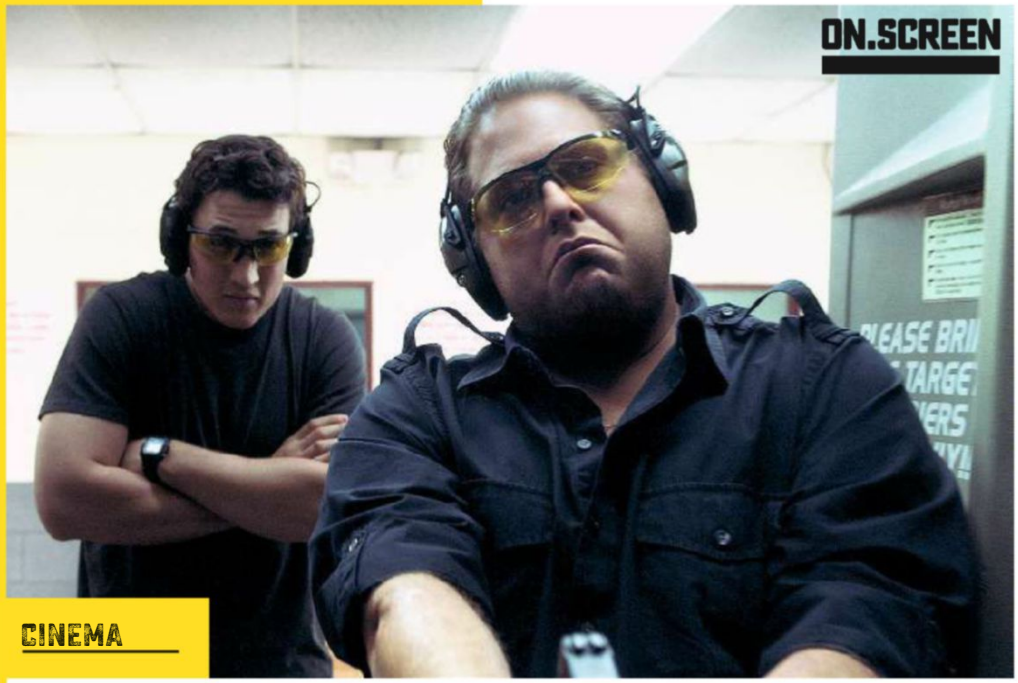


IMPERIUM

★★★

OUT **23 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **15** / **109 MINS**
DIRECTOR Daniel Ragussis
CAST Daniel Radcliffe, Toni Collette, Tracy Letts, Sam Trammell, Nestor Carbonell

IF YOU WERE looking for a person to go undercover as a violent skinhead, someone like Daniel Radcliffe would be an unlikely first choice — although his on-screen character, Nate, is equally dubious about the mission. Unused to fieldwork — let alone gangs of thugs planning a terrorist attack — his superior (an excellent Toni Collette) nevertheless picks him for the job. And his physical transformation is just enough to convince that Nate the agent — and Dan the actor — could just about pull this off. What unfolds is an undercover thriller that's gripping in parts but strangely aimless in others, weighed down with too much talking when a jolt of action would have helped spark it to life. **ALS**



CINEMA

WAR DOGS

★★★

OUT **26 AUGUST**
CERT **15** / **114 MINS**

DIRECTOR Todd Phillips
CAST Jonah Hill, Miles Teller, Ana de Armas, Bradley Cooper

PLOT Florida, 2005. With America fighting simultaneous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, two twentysomething high school buddies get rich quick dealing weapons. But their dubious legal practices soon catch up with them.

WAR DOGS IS being sold as a comedy, and given that it boasts *The Hangover* director Todd Phillips behind the wheel, perhaps understandably so. But those hoping to see Ken Jeong leap naked from the boot of a car are liable to be disappointed. There's plenty of darkly funny moments, but this is a largely serious movie about an entirely serious subject.

As a pacy opening spiel informs us, war is big business, and business was never more booming than during the go-go early 2000s, when President Bush opened the floodgates to small private arms contractors. Practically anyone could grab a piece of the pie — even a couple of flip-flop wearing stoners like David Packouz (Teller) and Efraim Diveroli (Hill), best friends at high school who reconnect. They're only aiming for crumbs, but when you're trading with the world's largest military, a single crumb is worth millions.

Both Teller and Hill are about ten years older than the unlikely real-life arms dealers they portray, but they bring a fun, sleazy charisma to their roles. David is depicted as a somewhat reluctant merchant of death — an erstwhile anti-war protester, in fact, lured only by a quick buck and the chance to escape his unfulfilling job as a massage therapist.

Efraim, meanwhile, seems more typical of his trade. A high-pitched giggle never far from his lips, he's a hustler, not above impersonating high-ranking military or grieving parents in order to get ahead. As we saw in *The Wolf Of Wall Street*, Hill does a good line in playing obnoxious douchebags, and he's on top form here.

We watch in guilty delight as their company (named AEY — an acronym which "doesn't stand for anything", in more ways than one) slowly graduates from a smoky bedroom to a gleaming Miami Beach office. The crumbs of war profiteering grow ever meatier, and the duo's methods grow ever shadier.

All of this — the rise-and-fall crime narrative, the all-American lust for money at any cost, the "how did I get here?" narration — aims for Scorsese. It very nearly reaches it, too. It's not as rich or sophisticated as Marty's masterpieces, and visually it's a little unambitious, but the gallows humour and the pace are there. One scene even manages to make the minutiae of cardboard-box negotiations entertaining.

Like much of Scorsese's work, it's heavily male-dominated, too. The only female character in the film is David's disapproving girlfriend, who exists purely to fret from the sidelines, afforded about as much depth as a 9mm shell. (At least Bradley Cooper's creepy arms dealer bluntly acknowledges the imbalance: "This is why I like the arms business — no women.")

Dick-swinging bravado is the film's prevailing orthodoxy, and in the process, it occasionally struggles to impart the fairly significant human cost of war profiteering. Only in a single gripping sequence, when the pair rather naively escort a shipment of guns to Baghdad, do we get any sense of the devastating conflicts they are helping to furnish.

Amorality plays such as *Thank You For Smoking* (or, yes, *The Wolf Of The Wall Street*) gave their terrible anti-heroes just enough rope with which to hang themselves. *War Dogs* may not give these douchebags quite enough ammo to shoot themselves with, but it's enough to give you pause. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT Buoyed by riveting lead performances, and driven by a compelling real-life story, this is proof that Phillips can handle grown-up material. All without a naked Ken Jeong.



CINEMA

THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS

★★★★★

OUT **23 SEPTEMBER**
CERT **15** / **111 MINS**

DIRECTOR Colm McCarthy
CAST Sennia Nanua, Gemma Arterton, Paddy Considine, Glenn Close

PLOT Melanie (Nanua) has grown up in a world enduring a zombie-like apocalypse thanks to a fungus known as the *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis*. She lives under heavy guard for reasons that are initially unclear, but when her home falls to the horde and she goes on the run, it emerges that she may be the key to ending the struggle.

THE GIRL WITH All The Gifts opens with a young girl called Melanie (Nanua) lovingly examining a photo of a kitten in a bare, concrete room. Her morning alarm — a siren — sounds, someone bangs on the metal door, then she's restrained, at gunpoint, before being trussed in restraints like a diminutive Hannibal Lecter before being wheeled to class. It's a startling, upsetting beginning to an adaptation of a novel about a teenage heroine that makes *The Hunger Games* look like *The Care Bears Movie*.

Why is this polite, perky kid treated like a monster? The answer unfolds as we meet a sympathetic teacher, Miss Justineau (Arterton), a sometimes brutal guard, Sgt Parks (Considine), and single-minded researcher Dr Caldwell (Close). An infectious fungus has reduced most of humanity to ravening flesh-eaters called 'hungries' (not as far-fetched as you might hope; Google "zombie fungus" and prepare for nightmares) who become frenzied at the smell of uninfected blood. Dr Caldwell suspects that Melanie and her kind — infected, but still conscious, children — may hold the key to a cure. But their fortified base is breached before Caldwell can finish her work, and a small party, including Melanie, find themselves running towards a safe haven.

This film is rooted deep in the zombie genre, from Romero's meaty social commentary to *28 Days Later*'s depiction of fast 'infected' in a derelict London to the killer fungus of *The Last Of Us*. But the tense atmosphere has more in common with the bleak, British sci-fi of *Threads* or *The Day Of The Triffids* than with some of the more bombastic American catastrophes. Still, while Mike Carey, adapting his own novel, has crafted a believable apocalypse, he and director Colm McCarthy (in only his second feature) use it principally as the backdrop to a moral story about complex, compromised characters.



There was definitely an AMT coffee stand round here somewhere.

Close, Considine and Arterton are established quantities, of course, and there's further able support from Fisayo Akinade and Anthony Welsh. But it's Nanua who proves the secret weapon. Her Melanie is bright and eager to learn, but more attentive and analytical than the adults sometimes realise. The combination of childlike delight in this brave new world and sometimes violent cunning is brilliantly balanced.

Behind the sunnier scenes as she naively explores her new surroundings lurks a classic conflict between individual and group needs. Humankind may benefit if Caldwell studies Melanie, but Melanie would not survive the procedure. And as the small group of survivors finally get the chance to see her as a person rather than a lab rat, their relationships change. Parks, in particular, shifts from open hostility to a guarded sort of mentoring, while Caldwell visibly begins to doubt her own assertions that Melanie is not a real child at all. Justineau becomes almost a mother figure to the lonely girl, but has trouble dealing with the devastated environment outside.

Despite their growing camaraderie, all the adults are still afraid of the youngster, and if this is an allegory, it's only barely. Teens all half-suspect, deep down, that their elders would prefer them restrained, while adults are equally scared that their offspring will supplant them. That inter-generational mistrust is reflected here in surprising ways as Melanie grows in her new environment. The slowly unfolding apocalypse around her would justify a certain level of despair — but Melanie's gift, amid the devastation, is to hold on to her own peculiar form of hope. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT The best zombie-ish apocalypse in years. Nanua is a major discovery, but it's the dense social commentary and moral dilemmas that will haunt you.



KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS

★★★★

OUT **9 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **TBC** / **TBC MINS**
DIRECTOR Travis Knight
CAST Charlize Theron, Art Parkinson, Ralph Fiennes, Matthew McConaughey, George Takei, Rooney Mara

STOP-MOTION ANIMATION studio Laika is now four from four, with no sign of a dud between its debut, *Coraline,* in 2009 to its latest, *Kubo And The Two Strings*. Lumbered with an unwieldy title (perhaps better suited to an introspective indie-folk band), *Kubo* is an original story presented as an ancient Japanese myth — hunted by his grandfather, the evil Moon King (Fiennes), Kubo (Parkinson) goes on a quest to locate a magical suit of armour. It's beautifully animated (look out for the way Kubo's hair moves), and while there are laughs and moments of effective (if light) horror, its emotional heart is what makes the film truly resonate. **JP**



BADEN BADEN

★★★★

OUT **23 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **15** / **95 MINS**
DIRECTOR Rachel Lang
CAST Salomé Richard, Claude Gensac, Lazare Gousseau, Swann Arlaud

FOLLOWING TWO SHORTS about an Alsatian tomboy seeking her niche, director Rachel Lang and actress Salomé Richard make deeply impressive feature bows with this freewheeling rite of passage. The episodic action hangs around Ana's (Richard) bid to replace her ailing grandmother's bathtub with a shower, but the tone keeps shifting as Ana tries to make sense of her relationships after a painful break-up with a pretentious video artist. Some may find the satirical and surreal incidents a touch too scattershot. But, employing meticulously composed naturalism, Lang deftly conveys the struggle of the younger generation to make a mark in a society in which they have too small a stake. **DP**



Ben Ainslie, genius photobomber, struck again.

CINEMA

CAFÉ SOCIETY

★★★

OUT **2 SEPTEMBER**
CERT **12A** / **96 MINS**

DIRECTOR Woody Allen
CAST Jesse Eisenberg, Kristen Stewart, Steve Carell, Blake Lively

PLOT 1930s Hollywood. New Yorker Bobby Dorfman (Eisenberg) arrives seeking employment from his uncle Phil Stern (Carell), a film agent. Working in the mailroom, he falls under the spell of Stern's secretary, Vonnie (Stewart), and they grow closer. Problem is, Vonnie's already seeing someone.

CAFÉ SOCIETY HAS enough charm, smarts and jokes to initially fool you it's another of Woody Allen's trademark returns to form. The truth is it falls far short of his '70s and '80s highs, so it's perhaps best we compare it to the more recent Allen canon. So: it doesn't hit the heights of *Midnight In Paris* or *Blue Jasmine*, but is fizzier than *Magic In The Moonlight* or *Irrational Man*, thriving on a clutch of great performances, great visuals and an affection for a Hollywood that doesn't exist anymore (if it ever did).

Allen's 47th feature follows the familiar formula: mensch-y heroes, romantic obstacles, funny one-liners ("Live every day like it's your last and one day you'll be right") and musings about mortality all played out to a soundtrack of jazz tunes. Like *Annie Hall*, *Café Society* thrives on the push and pull between Los Angeles and New York. Like *Bullets Over Broadway*, it effects a collision between the artistic world and the underworld, exemplified by Bobby's (Eisenberg) gangster brother (Corey Still) forever burying his rivals in concrete. And, as Bobby returns to New York to run a nightclub, it has a *Radio Days* quality — spinning a series of vignettes (narrated by Allen in a stilted drawl) that juxtapose the domestic comedy of Jewish family life with the glam of high society.

It's intelligently cast: after *Adventureland* and the flawed but interesting *American Ultra*, Eisenberg and Stewart have an easy chemistry, a naturalness that makes a rote courtship engaging. *Café Society* may get nowhere near the emotional wallop (or sharp laughs) of *Annie Hall* but Allen still finds affecting things to say. As Bobby and Vonnie come together and move apart (and come together again?), it becomes a film about the romantic roads never travelled and the poignant ways in which change is inevitable.

Eisenberg starts the movie as a neurotic Allen surrogate — a scene where he gets flustered with a prostitute (Anna Camp) is peak Woody — but neatly conveys Bobby's growing confidence and sense of something missing. But Stewart steals the movie. Her Vonnie starts the film as someone grounded and real, unfazed by Hollywood pizzazz, but Stewart slowly reveals different colours, investing Allen's very writerly language with life and conveying depths with just a look. This, plus her work with Olivier Assayas (*Clouds Of Sils Maria*, *Personal Shopper*), confirms her as one of the most exciting talents working today. *Twilight* suddenly seems a long time ago.

And despite the recognisable Allen motifs, there are also firsts. *Café Society* is his first film shot digitally and his first with noted cinematographer Vittorio Storaro (*Apocalypse Now*, *Last Tango In Paris*). The result is his most gorgeous film in ages, from the beautiful silhouettes in a motel room during a power cut to the camera snaking through Bobby's nightclub, like a golden age *GoodFellas*. It's been a long time since Allen has been so cinematically ambitious. He should try it more often. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT Notable for a superb Kristen Stewart performance, this entertaining lament to old Hollywood and lost love sits between major and minor Woody.



ANTHROPOID

★★★★

OUT **9 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **15** / **120 MINS**
DIRECTOR Sean Ellis
CAST Cillian Murphy, Jamie Dornan, Charlotte Le Bon, Toby Jones

THE CATHEDRAL GUN battle that rages during the climax to this World War II drama is one of the most authentic and nerve-jangling set-pieces of the year so far. It is also a potent conclusion to a powerful film. Drawing inspiration from a largely overlooked moment of the war, *Metro Manila* director Sean Ellis casts Murphy and Dornan as Czechoslovakian freedom fighters parachuted into their occupied homeland in a bid to assassinate SS officer Reinhard Heydrich, the 'Butcher of Prague' and main architect of the Holocaust. Their travails are emotionally as well as logistically challenging, with Ellis unflinching in his presentation of the Nazis' cruel retort. **WL**

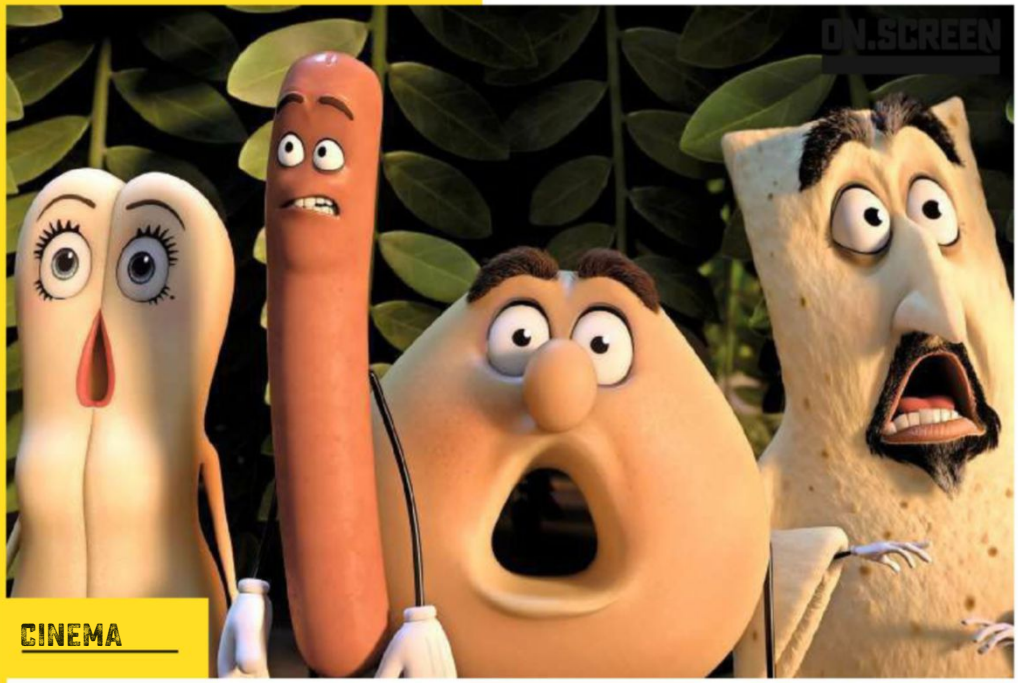


JIM: THE JAMES FOLEY STORY

★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **15** / **113 MINS**
DIRECTOR Brian Oakes
CAST Diane Foley, John Foley, John Foley Jr, Michael Foley

AMERICA WAS APPALLED by the ISIS beheading of war correspondent James Foley in 2014. Childhood friend and first-time filmmaker Brian Oakes struggles to convey the enormity of the shock in an affectionate tribute that soberly blends archive footage, abstract reconstructions and interviews with family members, press colleagues and fellow hostages in tracing how Foley came to be abducted while reporting in Libya and Syria. All agree Foley was a remarkable man whose heart was in the right place. But the poignant testimony lacks geopolitical context and cogent insight into his psyche and the value of conflict journalism. Consequently, this rarely rises above being a personal lament. **DP**



CINEMA

SAUSAGE PARTY

★★★★

OUT **12 AUGUST**
CERT **15** / **89 MINS**

DIRECTORS Conrad Vernon, Greg Tiernan
CAST Seth Rogen, Kristen Wiig, Jonah Hill, Bill Hader, Michael Cera, Edward Norton, Salma Hayek, James Franco, Paul Rudd

PLOT Shopwell's supermarket is full of happy groceries, waiting to go to the 'Great Beyond'. But one day they discover evidence to suggest there is a much darker future in store for them.

IN THE ORIGINAL *Shrek*, the Gingerbread Man is tortured by the vile Lord Farquaad. Dunked in milk with his legs ripped off, he's threatened with even worse bodily harm. "No, not my buttons!" he squeals. "Not my gumdrop buttons!"

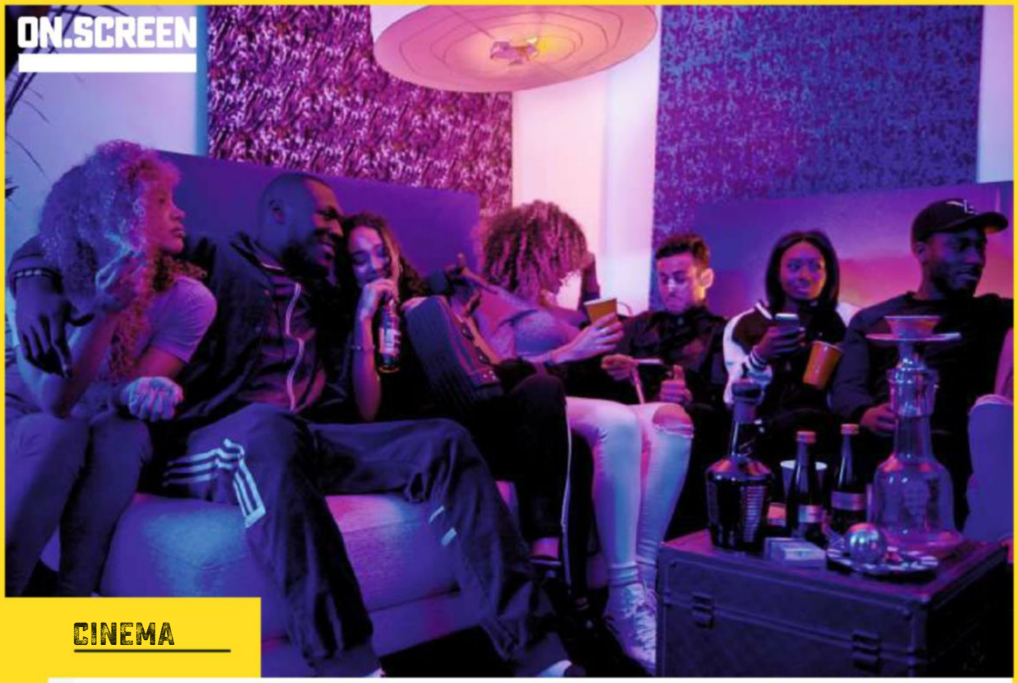
It's apt that Conrad Vernon, the man who both created and voiced 'Gingy', is one of the co-directors of *Sausage Party*. Because, like the scene described above, this unlikeliest of summer-season animations is a weird hybrid of cutesy cartoon and horror flick, a tale in which awful things happen to sentient food products. It is very, very rude. It is also very, very funny. Both are due mostly to Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, the originators of the project, who decide to spoof the Pixar movies they loved. What if the premise of a film like *Toy Story*, in which inanimate objects come to terms with the meaning of their existence, was pushed to its logical, dark-as-hell conclusion? There's an increasing glee to *Sausage Party* (a tale about pork that's more sex-obsessed than *Porky's*) as it heads towards its demented denouement.

Brought to life by sub-Pixar but decent CGI, it bustles with anthropomorphic edibles. Frank (Rogen) is a sausage with feelings for a hot-dog bun named Brenda (Wiig). He shares a packet with weenie buddies Barry (Cera) and Carl (Hill). There's a tomato voiced by Rudd, a sultry taco with the tones of Hayek, even a Hitler-esque sauerkraut who yells, "Exterminate the juice!" If you're wondering how many puns on food names there are here, the answer is *a lot*. For the first stretch, in fact, it seems like that might be all *Sausage Party* has to offer, besides enough raunch to make a beetroot blush.

Gradually, though, it reveals itself to be a surprisingly bold piece of work, with some big ideas on its mind. The return of a panicked jar of honey mustard (Danny McBride) to the store, raving about the abuse meted out to food items by humans, triggers an existential crisis in Frank, who sets out to investigate. The concept of organised religion is explored, as the lone sausage tries to convince his blissed-out companions they might be headed not for a glorious afterlife, but rather knife-assisted oblivion. Even the Israel/Palestine conflict is riffed upon, through the unlikely medium of a relationship between a lavash (David Krumholtz) and a bagel (Norton, doing a big, goofy impression of Woody Allen and just about stealing the show).

But *Sausage Party*'s smarts are well-concealed beneath a layer of utter filth, which ramps up and up until a late set-piece that will likely make you choke with laughter: think *Caligula* re-enacted by condiments. Bringing to mind the go-for-broke vibe of *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut*, the final reel unleashes debauchery and mayhem of a kind that makes you wonder if a studio exec ever checked in on the production. There are barren patches — the villain, an actual douche played as a psychotic frat bro by Nick Kroll, is more loud than funny, and some of the gags have surely come directly from a pack of Christmas crackers — but Rogen and Goldberg have succeeded in cooking up something truly original. The finale, meanwhile, suggests an even more meta sequel might be on its way. We never thought we'd say this, but we're looking forward to finding out where these sausages go. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT It sounded like the dumbest movie of all time, but it's actually smart, subversive and packed with famous voices saying wonderfully unspeakable things. In fact, it's a banger.



CINEMA

BROTHERHOOD

★★★

OUT **2 SEPTEMBER**
CERT **15** / **105 MINS**

DIRECTOR Noel Clarke
CAST Noel Clarke, Jason Maza, Mike 'Stormzy' Omari, Arnold Oceng, David Ajala, Cornell John, Shanika Warren-Markland, Red Madrell, Fady Elsayed

PLOT A decade on from the events of *Kidulthood*, Sam Peel (Clarke) has put his old life on the streets behind him in favour of a stable existence with girlfriend Kayla (Warren-Markland) and two kids. But this new reality is threatened when an enemy from the past comes looking for revenge.

FOR THOSE WHO scarcely recognise the version of West London propagated by *Four Weddings* and *Notting Hill*, writer/director/actor Noel Clarke's sketch of the dangerous streets humming with violence, just alongside those townhouses with the bright doors, has long offered a hyperreal contrast. Now, a decade on from first film *Kidulthood*, not only has the world changed, but so has the man behind it. And yet, as Clarke reveals in this, the third and final part of the trilogy (helpfully hashtagged #theend), the years may pass and the world may change, but that doesn't prevent your life spinning backwards in the blink of an eye.

Clarke's Sam Peel, who we last saw in *Adulthood* surviving many, many attempts on his life after coming out of prison for murder, is now older, heavier and unfortunately (you suspect) not completely wiser. And his house, four jobs, lawyer girlfriend Kayla (Warren-Markland) and, most significantly, two kids, aren't enough to save him from being pulled into the underworld when his family are threatened and his brother is shot in the opening sequence. "The only person more dangerous than someone with nothing to lose is someone who stands to lose everything," says Sam of this trigger for the return of the hoodie and the man he used to be (and perhaps, still is).

As with the previous two films, the violence is graphic and the representation of women ugly — 90 per cent of them are abused, dismissed, belittled, brutalised, and/or referred to as "slags". But, while it ain't pretty, arguably this is the power and potency of Clarke's films. He refuses to whitewash the realities of working-class inner city life on the streets of West London, even if it is difficult for us to watch.

Balance, though, comes in two forms: firstly, the characters of Kayla and quick-mouthed young hood Poppy (Rosa Coduri), both demanding respect amidst the self-sabotage and insecurity-induced misogyny they encounter.

And secondly, and most brilliantly, dark and supremely daft humour — often where you least expect it (including a thread about a Sainsbury's discount card that serves as a pretty beautiful metaphor for the tension between old and new realities). Leading the charge on this front — and stealing much of the film from under Clarke's nose — is Henry (Oceng), reluctant sidekick in Sam's descent into the underworld, who drives a Toyota Prius, makes jewellery with his wife and tells a group of new kids on the street to "back it up before I heat it up" while holding his son's action figure as a fake gun.

There are missteps, however; miscalculations which undercut the necessary tension just as it reaches fever pitch. Jason Maza — part Gal Dove, part Tommy DeVito — plays gangland boss Daley on a knife edge of absurdity (staying the right side of it in the main), but returning bad guy Uncle Curtis (John) lurches too willingly from menace into melodrama. And Clarke can't avoid employing the third-in-a-trilogy tropes: one last job/reformed guy helps new guy who is essentially him/grossly unfair family tragedy as his three-parter reaches its too-neat conclusion. But perhaps that was inevitable. **TERRI WHITE**

VERDICT **The final film in Clarke's trilogy may lack the punch — if not paunch — of the previous two, but it remains a unique look at the realities of British inner-city life.**



THE BEATLES: EIGHT DAYS A WEEK — THE TOURING YEARS

★★★

OUT **15 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **TBC** / **100 MINS**
DIRECTOR Ron Howard
CAST Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, John Lennon (archive), George Harrison (archive), Whoopi Goldberg

WHAT NEW IS there to say about The Beatles? Not much, if Ron Howard's documentary covering the years from 1962 to 1966 is anything to go by. Beatlemania, Shea Stadium and "more popular than Jesus" are all covered, but the 'touring years' structure leaves the impression it's a story half told. That said, it's never less than entertaining — a reminder of just how talented and charismatic the Fab Four were. And, of course, the great advantage it has is The Beatles' music, so concert footage is a delight rather than a chore. Which wouldn't be the case in, say, a Nickelback documentary. **JP**



DON'T BREATHE

★★★★

OUT **9 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **15** / **88 MINS**
DIRECTOR Fede Alvarez
CAST Stephen Lang, Jane Levy, Dylan Minnette, Daniel Zovatto

THREE ROBBERS (LEVY, Minnette, Zovatto) target a house, believing a blind combat veteran (Lang) has a large cash sum to hand. Once inside, they discover the homeowner is dangerously resourceful. Having dashed off the *Evil Dead* remake, director-writer Fede Alvarez doesn't break new ground with this 'original' — but demonstrates profound understanding of how to prolong the agony. Whenever one of the robbers has a chance to get away, something pulls them back. An intense, streamlined exercise in gruesome thrills, with a glimmer of social context (it's all about the economy) which doesn't take away from the exciting struggle to get out of this house of horrors. **KN**



That age-old dilemma: was it a bull or a cow?

HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE

★★★★★

OUT **16 SEPTEMBER**
CERT **12A / 101 MINS**

DIRECTOR Taika Waititi
CAST Julian Dennison, Sam Neill, Rachel House, Rima Te Wiata, Rhys Darby

PLOT After being delivered by child welfare services to a remote farm in the New Zealand countryside, troublesome fat kid Ricky Baker (Dennison) finds himself the object of a national manhunt when he and his grumpy foster father, 'Uncle Hec' (Neill), accidentally go missing in the bush.

TAIKA WAITITI HAS had a stranger career trajectory than most. That he's the man who's being trusted to make *Thor: Ragnarok* by Marvel Studios implies a certain kind of director, but his previous film — 2014's horror-mockumentary *What We Do In The Shadows* — suggests someone entirely different. And if you were surprised to see Marvel hand him such a high-profile gig, *Hunt For The Wilderpeople* is hardly going to make you feel differently.

But that's by no means a bad thing. Coming on like a low-budget, live-action *Up* directed by a Wes Anderson who doesn't mind getting muddy, this adaptation of Barry Crump's 1986 novel *Wild Pork And Watercress* is the ideal showcase for Waititi's exuberant sense of humour and flair for inventive absurdity. Neill is the nominal star, playing grieving ex-convict Hec Faulkner, though it's 13-year-old Dennison who gets all the best lines as the juvenile delinquent on a bizarre outback adventure. At one point, the pair have to cower beneath an outcrop as their pursuers stalk overhead. Ricky frantically gestures at his foster dad-turned-wilderness survival mentor, but Hec can't work out what vital information he's trying to convey. The danger passes; Hec wants to know what the problem was. "I was trying to tell you it was like *The Lord Of The Rings*!" exclaims Ricky.

Divided into ten titled chapters, which feature the world's worst eulogy (courtesy of a fantastic Waititi cameo), seemingly gigantic wild boar and a climactic car chase that references *Thelma & Louise*, *Wilderpeople* presents a comically heightened world. This may nudge a few of its inhabitants into caricature territory, but it's mitigated by a strong sense of warmth, sweetness and humanity pervading the entire film.

Once again, Dennison is the hero here. As Ricky, he can be obtuse, offensive and obsessed with being "gangster". But moments later he'll remind us he's an abandoned child in need of emotional security — such as when he develops a dependence on hot water bottles or envisions a girl he meets in a faux-erotic '80s Flake ad.

And with Neill he forms a fractious double act that manages to develop a convincing emotional connection between spiky whippersnapper and cantankerous old-timer without miring itself in 'heartwarming' cliché. There's a refreshing lack of sentimentality to *Wilderpeople* and Waititi allows the drama to hit hard where it needs to, so it roots itself far deeper than the whimsical trimmings might suggest. Some scenes will get you swearing there's just something in your eye; others will make you honk like a goose on nitrous oxide. You'll be left with a glow that'll ensure *Wilderpeople* a place on your best-of-year list.

Deftly balancing humanity with comedy? Creating nuanced, loveable characters within a style-heightened world? Actually, perhaps Waititi's Marvel gig *isn't* so surprising, after all. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT A bit *Up*, a bit *Moonrise Kingdom*, a bit *Midnight Run*, even... Taika Waititi's latest is an oddball treat of a mismatched-buddy pursuit move.



THE INFILTRATOR

★★★

OUT **16 SEPTEMBER**
CERT **TBC** / **127 MINS**

DIRECTOR Brad Furman
CAST Bryan Cranston, Diane Kruger, John Leguizamo, Benjamin Bratt, Amy Ryan

PLOT Mid-1980s, Florida. US Customs agent Robert Mazur (Cranston) specialises in deep undercover assignments, but his next gig — posing as a slick businessman, alongside Kathy Ertz (Kruger) and Emir Abreu (Leguizamo), in order to ensnare renowned Colombian drug lord/trafficker Pablo Escobar — may prove to be his most dangerous yet.

BRYAN CRANSTON HAS form when it comes to dealing with ruthless drug cartels. He spent several years doing it to astonishing, Emmy-winning effect on *Breaking Bad*, and now here he is once again, doing deals with the kind of people who'd shoot you in the face as soon as give you the time of day. Not that this is 'Breaking Bad: The Movie', though. In fact, *The Infiltrator* sees Cranston very much on the side of the angels — 'Breaking Good', if you will — as a heroic, albeit beleaguered customs officer who has a brainwave: instead of following the drugs in an attempt to catch Pablo Escobar and his coterie of Colombian bad guys, follow the money instead.

So, leaving his wife and kids behind, he forges a new life for himself as Bob Musella, a fast-talking, big-haired, flamboyantly dodgy businessman who, through a series of encounters with contacts, gets ever closer to the heart of Escobar's business. Along the way, Mazur is plunged into a series of life and death situations which director Furman — here making proper use of the talents of Cranston and John Leguizamo after blink-and-you'll-miss-'em appearances in his otherwise excellent *The Lincoln Lawyer* — presents with a suitably sweaty, hazy sheen. Despite the huge houses, expensive cars and sharp suits, Furman is keen to show that this is not a world of glamour. It's a dirty, dangerous, seedy world where a conversation with a potential snitch can suddenly turn into a drive-by shooting, or where a meeting with corrupt bankers can be endangered when the Feds' clunky hidden tape recorder suddenly pops into plain view. One scene, in which Leguizamo's cop is on the verge of being outed in front of the type of guys who don't take kindly to lawmen, is a mini-masterclass in building tension.



They'd *always* wanted someone to hold up signs with their names on at the airport.

Yet it's hard not to think that we've seen all the undercover cop malarkey before — *Donnie Brasco* being the obvious example. Although one twist comes with the presence of the excellent Diane Kruger, as a fellow customs official who's dragged away from her day-to-day desk job and thrust into the centre of the operation in the role of Cranston's fiancée. Her relationship with Mazur — two souls suddenly thrust together into unimaginable danger — is a welcome wrinkle and, as they end up forging a genuine friendship with Bratt's Mr Big and his wife, the surprising heart of the film.

But even if much of it seems familiar, Cranston is fantastic in his best big-screen role to date. As fun as he was in *Trumbo*, that was less a fully fleshed-out character, more of an arch impersonation, if you will. Here he has more room to put his own stamp on Mazur. Asking interesting questions about how far undercover officials should go in the name of duty — such as when Mazur is forced to adopt a tough-guy persona in front of his wife when he randomly runs into a Mob acquaintance at a restaurant — Cranston paints his official as a decent guy struggling desperately to retain his humanity in the midst of those who have none. It's a heavyweight role (he's in virtually every scene of the two-hour movie), one of those delicious turns where he's almost always giving a performance within the performance, and may well see Cranston back in the conversation again come Academy Award season. If only the rest of the film was quite as good. **CHRIS HEWITT**

VERDICT Often gripping, and elevated by Cranston's superb central performance. But it's hard not to feel like we've seen this before, often and done better.



THE BLUE ROOM

★★★★

OUT **9 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **15** / **75 MINS**
DIRECTOR Mathieu Amalric
CAST Mathieu Amalric, Léa Drucker, Stéphanie Cléau, Laurent Poitrenaux

THE 1964 GEORGES Simenon novel on which this film is based was published towards the end of the French New Wave, and the influence can be felt throughout this simmering psychological thriller, which flits between salesman Julien's (Amalric) affair with pharmacist Esther (Cléau) and his interrogation by various cops, a shrink and a judge. Such is the tautness of the writing and direction that facts and clues are at a premium. But Amalric dissects bourgeois morality with an unrelenting precision worthy of Claude Chabrol, as his regretful adulterer tries to make sense of how events spiralled out of his control. Superbly played, tensely edited and moodily photographed, this is teasingly compelling. **DP**



LITTLE MEN

★★★★

OUT **23 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **TBC** / **85 MINS**
DIRECTOR Ira Sachs
CAST Theo Taplitz, Michael Barbieri, Jennifer Ehle, Greg Kinnear

FOLLOWING UP *LOVE Is Strange* with another heartfelt slice of urban Bohemia, Ira Sachs' latest gem is a New York real-estate parable with lots to say about friendships, families and teenage growing pains. Schoolmates Jake (newcomer Taplitz) and Tony (Barbieri) are unlikely pals — the former shy, arty, dressed like Max from *Rushmore*; the latter extrovert, fiery, "with a thing for redheads" — and their friendship is soon tested by their parents' feud over the lease on an inherited property. Both kids are terrific, holding their own within a seasoned cast, but it's Sachs' clear empathy towards all of his characters, both young and old, that makes this such a warm and winning tale. **PDS**



Tron 3 dialled it back to basics.

JASON BOURNE

★★★★

OUT **NOW**
CERT **12A** / **123 MINS**

DIRECTOR Paul Greengrass
CAST Matt Damon, Julia Stiles, Alicia Vikander, Vincent Cassel, Tommy Lee Jones

PLOT Former assassin Jason Bourne (Damon) is living off the grid as a bareknuckle fighter. But when old ally Nicky Parsons (Stiles) finds him, he's drawn into a global conspiracy involving social media encryption, a villainous CIA chief (Jones) and a final secret about his past.

FEW SAGA-CLOSING images are as potent as Matt Damon swimming into the distant murk of New York's East River at the end of *The Bourne Ultimatum*. So, it's a testament to the hurtling sense of purpose at the heart of this visceral, uncompromising fifth instalment in the spy franchise that, as everyone's favourite amnesiac assassin brings his brand of improvised chaos to Las Vegas, you find you've completely forgotten why he had to go away in the first place.

The double-tied plot threads that made Damon's previous (and supposedly last) appearance in the series such a conclusive knot all melt away in the face of *Jason Bourne*'s frenzied symphony of exhilarating set-pieces and perfect casting. We meet Bourne on the Greek-Albanian border, seemingly content to live out his days grimly knocking out shirtless men as a bareknuckle fighter. Meanwhile in Reykjavik, Nicky Parsons (Stiles, providing useful continuity) pilfers a USB file of information on a new Treadstone-like super-agent programme and a pivotal, redacted account of what really happened to Bourne's father.

She sets off for a rendezvous with Bourne, unaware that CIA cyber division chief Heather Lee (Vikander, bringing nuance and grit), morally flexible agency director Robert Dewey (a craggy, formidable Jones) and, on the ground, a Gallic assassin known only as 'The Asset' (Cassel, proving an absurdly good fit for the series) are on her trail. So begins the customary game of cat-and-mouse as Bourne, grudgingly, re-enters the fray.

Yes, *Jason Bourne* basically amounts to a trio of action set-pieces elegantly strung together. But who really cares when they're this impressive? Greengrass — returning director of *Supremacy* and *Ultimatum* — hurls us into the smoke and noise of a nocturnal riot in Athens as easily as he turns Paddington into a crowded arena for nerve-jangling spy games. A hand-to-hand showdown, when it comes, is wincingly intense, replete with audible knife slashes, crunching blows and (of course) creatively deployed household items.

Then there's Vegas. Its glowing slot machines and gaudy neon may seem an unlikely backdrop for *Bourne*'s brand of unadorned realism but the car chase here is one for the ages — an unpredictable opera of carnage that will have you dodging imaginary shards of debris in your seat.

One major wrinkle is the dialogue, which is either freighted with exposition or desperately straining to be of-the-moment. ("You're making this country much more difficult to defend," growls Dewey in an exchange with Riz Ahmed's Silicon Valley boy king that sounds more like a Snowden op-ed than a human conversation.)

But this is a worthy return that, unsurprisingly, leaves the door ajar for more and underlines the fact that Greengrass' eye for kinetic action and Damon's tortured soulfulness is the secret sauce that lifts these films above their countless imitators. It's one thing to know the moves — it's quite another to master them. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT Damon and Greengrass return to give the espionage genre another energising smack round the chops. A bold and eerily topical masterpiece of stuntcraft and bruising action.



TWO WOMEN

★

OUT **16 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **U** / **104 MINS**
DIRECTOR Vera Glagoleva
CAST Ralph Fiennes, Sylvie Testud, Aleksandr Baluev

RALPH FIENNES MAKES the inexplicable decision to head to Russia for an extended cameo in this bargain-basement Ivan Turgenev adaptation — his time would have been better spent with a turn at the National, or perhaps grouting his bathroom. Two interlocking love triangles intersect over a few days at a 19th century country estate, but the comic potential is squandered by a strange insistence on playing the goofy hijinks straight. A drawing-room comedy is a strange choice to treat as a high tragedy, and things get so crushingly tedious, your time is better spent idly speculating on the Gulags these painfully bourgeois characters' descendants would end up in. **AL**



THE 9TH LIFE OF LOUIS DRAX

★★★

OUT **2 SEPTEMBER** / CERT **15** / **108 MINS**
DIRECTOR Alexandre Aja
CAST Jamie Dornan, Sarah Gadon, Aaron Paul, Aiden Longworth

AN ADAPTATION OF Liz Jensen's 2004 novel, horror veteran Alexandre Aja (*The Hills Have Eyes*) emphasises the unsettling beats in this slight parable about an accident-prone boy (Longworth) seemingly resilient to incidents that would see off most mortals. That is, until he falls off a cliff and ends up in a coma. Treating him is Dr Allan Pascal (Dornan, employing the troubling magnetism that won him the role of Christian Grey) who is married but drawn to Louis' mum (Gadon) even as the child's shady dad (Paul) lurks close by. Blending fantastical elements with gloomy themes makes for an odd tone, compounded by ethically dubious, aggressively unlikeable characters (even the boy). The film certainly intrigues at times, but it's hard to love. **LB**



CINEMA

DAVID BRENT: LIFE ON THE ROAD

★★

OUT **19 AUGUST**
CERT **15** / **96 MINS**

DIRECTOR Ricky Gervais
CAST Ricky Gervais, Ben Bailey Smith, Tom Basden, Tom Bennett, Jo Hartley, Andy Burrows

PLOT Long after his days at Wernham Hogg, David Brent is working as a sales rep at a Slough-based cleaning products distributor — but he has a plan. Using his pension to finance one final punt at his dream, he stages a three-week tour with his reluctant band and a rapping protégé (Smith).

DAVID BRENT HAS experienced all manner of humiliations — accidentally headbutting a potential secretary, getting fired on camera, the grunting majesty of "the dance" — but as he wanders through this fitfully funny big-screen resurrection you feel sorry for him for an entirely new reason. Slough's premier entertainer has been denied his perfect ending.

Fifteen years after *The Office* started — and nearly 13 after it concluded with a pair of peerless festive specials — Brent has been revived, against the odds, as the subject of his own feature-length mock rockumentary. Ricky Gervais, inspired by bringing the character back for a 2013 Red Nose Day special and resultant YouTube series, has gone back on his declaration that Brent wouldn't return with characteristic bullishness ("I've changed my mind") and thrust one of modern comedy's most enduring characters into the post-*Inbetweeners Movie* age. But *Life On The Road* can never quite escape unfavourable comparison to that first finale and, in the end, it mostly feels like a faint photocopy of what's gone before.

That said, it starts strongly. Gervais, directing from his own script, deploys the rollicking title track ("Then to Gloucester/I get a Costa") to reintroduce Brent in his new guise as a sales rep at cleaning products company Lavichem. The premise is quickly established: despite a fresh stable of colleagues (including Gareth Keenan-like cohort Nigel), Wernham Hogg's former regional manager is cashing in some annual leave and a chunk of his pension to fund a three-week tour of the M4 corridor. And, yet again, he's invited documentary cameras along for the ride.

The scenes where Brent frantically gathers his touring team — including Tom Basden's sound engineer, a rebooted version of his band Foregone Conclusion and Ben Bailey Smith, reviving his role as rapper Dom Johnson from the 2013 sketch — are hugely funny in a familiar, arm-gnawingly awkward way. The character of Brent still fits Gervais like an old leather jacket and those recognisable tics (the furtive glance to camera, the nervous laugh, the clenched overbite) add to the desperation as the band's frontman effectively pays younger men to hang out with him while he frantically chases a fading dream.

But once the band hits the road and actually starts playing to half-empty crowds, a lot of the laughs dry up. "Edgy" gags about race become a crutch, comic beats from *The Office* are lifted wholesale and a high quantity of the punchlines operate on a heavy-set woman being the funniest thing in the world. The song performances — including *Please Don't Make Fun Of The Disableds* — still raise a dark chuckle, but there's the inescapable sense of a scramble to fill the 96 minutes, and the presence of ex-Razorlight musician Andy Burrows (who plays a member of the band and wrote Brent's tracks with Gervais) does little to detract from the feeling that you're watching an extended charity sketch.

Then there's the ending: a lurch to trowelled-on bathos that packs familiar emotional crescendos and actually brings to mind a different Gervais vehicle known more for its overt sentimentality. And then it hits you — at its worst, *Life On The Road* may just be a *Derek* film, delivered by stealth. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT Ricky Gervais very much plays the hits in an undercooked but occasionally funny big-screen revival that suffers from a crippling case of *déjà vu*. Brent's last goodbye? You'd hope so.



SUICIDE SQUAD

★★★★

OUT **NOW**
CERT **15** / **123 MINS**

DIRECTOR David Ayer
CAST Will Smith, Margot Robbie, Jared Leto, Joel Kinnaman, Viola Davis, Jai Courtney, Jay Hernandez, Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje, Cara Delevingne

PLOT Evil government agent Amanda Waller (Viola Davis) has a plan to deal with the Superman-heralded 'metahuman' threat to the world: coerce the globe's deadliest bad guys into an emergency super-team. And when Midway City becomes the heart of a plot to extinguish humanity, that's just what she does, with expectedly unexpected results.

IF MARVEL HAS the best superheroes, so, the prevailing geek-logic goes, DC has the coolest villains. So it's only sensible they're finally placed front, centre and in the firing line. Filling its entire super-team with previously unseen antagonists, *Suicide Squad* represents a Flash-speed sprint of a catch-up for the rapidly forming DC Cinematic Universe. And, on that front at least, it's a real hoot.

Deadshot, "the most wanted hitman in the world", is delivered with heat-of-the-action poise and a generous side order of sass by Will Smith. Then there's Harley Quinn, the Jokerette, if you like; though "crazier than him, and more dangerous". Margot Robbie, skipping about in pants hotter than hell's sauna, doesn't quite steal this show — but she sure borrows it from time to time, and repays you with enough interest to make the mooted Harley stand-alone an enticement.

Plus, among others, we have tinnie-swigging, stick-hurling Captain Boomerang, which finally sees Jai Courtney flexing his rough charisma on screen; and flame-moulding gang-banger Diablo, the team's unlikely conscience in the impressively intense, tat-etched form of Jay Hernandez.

It's quite the roll call. And, despite the rich material, director David Ayer is a brave man to marshal this Dirty Half-ish-Dozen. Thinking he was making the "funny, smart-talking, cool little brother" to *Batman v Superman*, he found himself tasked with turning back the wave of negativity that smashed Zack Snyder's *Dawn Of Justice*.

More used to spelunking in the man-caves of the testosteronic psyche with the likes of *End Of Watch* and 2014's underrated war movie *Fury*, Ayer might seem an unlikely candidate to rescue a comic-book blockbuster series, but, like his unpredictable, mismatched characters, he pulls it off with gritty-flashy aplomb. Well, for the most part. Whatever the truth behind the reasons for additional shooting (standard



Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn: *Suicide Squad*'s home run.

procedure, or last-minute *Deadpool*-style humour injection?) you can't help but inhale the sweaty waft of 11th-hour scrambling in what proves to be a scrappy final edit. False starts, oddly placed flashbacks, clunky cameos (Ben Affleck's Batman, Ezra Miller's Flash) and a muddled chronology detract from the grungy, kooky, DayGlo-splashed fun, and it takes a good 45 minutes (plus the mystifyingly late introduction of one complete non-event of a character) for the set-up to stop flapping and jittering about and the action proper to kick in. Also, in striving to find a threat deadly enough to warrant asking bad guys to save the world, the film's answer is less than satisfying. We get little more than just another posturing villain with vague plans for world domination via a big, swirling mass of CGI.

Still, at least elsewhere there's a proper bad guy to chew on. Though only a wild card, occasionally capering in and out of the main plot, Jared Leto's incarnation of the Joker is essential to its success. Where Heath Ledger's version was scarred, shabby and countercultural, Leto's has a smooth, blingy gangsta swagger; a modern take on the way the original comic-book creation riffed on '30s mobsters. But it's not his swish, purring style and elegant, slo-mo cackle that really hooks you, it's something we've never seen before: the Joker in love. Here's a fascinatingly jagged new angle (cinematically at least). It's unsettling and compelling — almost enough to make you wish it were more than a subplot.

But there's more to come, surely? Judging by what Ayer's pulled off here, you can bet there will be. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT Like *Avengers Assemble* forced through a *Deadpool* mangle, *Suicide Squad* gives new life to DC's big-screen universe. So bad-to-the-bone it's good.



ALLEYCATS

★★

DVD; DOWNLOAD
OUT **NOW** / CERT **TBC** / **101 MINS**
DIRECTOR Ian Bonhôte
CAST Eleanor Tomlinson, Sonoya Mizuno

CYCLE COURIERS, ACCORDING to this low-budget Britflick, aren't the unsung heroes of London life, but a roguish band of outsiders with a strict loyalty code who engage in *Fast And Furious*-style illegal races. Ludicrous, sure, but that's without factoring in the cycle of blackmail, betrayal and bereavement a group of them get into when one of them witnesses a politician seemingly in the aftermath of a murder. It's all a little unconvincing, especially the suspiciously cut-glass accents of some of the supposedly socially outcast couriers, the alternately hysterical and sleepy acting, and British film's umpteenth set of implausible gangsters. Watch *Premium Rush* instead. **AL**



TICKLED

★★★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT **15** / **92 MINS**
DIRECTORS Dylan Reeve, David Farrierd
CAST David Farrier, Dylan Reeve, David Starr

WITH ITS JAUNTY music and chin-stroke tone, New Zealand documentary *Tickled* starts out like it's going to be a bit of a lark. While researching one of his "And finally..." stories for *3 News*, co-director David Farrier came across a website asking for volunteers to take part in "Competitive Endurance Tickling", and thought it would make a funny piece. So he contacted the company behind this odd sport... And, in response, received homophobic slurs and cease-and-desist threats from lawyers. Gradually, insidiously, as Farrier digs deeper, the lark turns dark, taking you somewhere totally unexpected. Though Farrier drops the pace and overplays his reveal, it feels like a Louis Theroux *Weird Weekend* spliced with a conspiracy thriller. Tickling, it seems, is no laughing matter. **DJ**



NARCOS: SEASON 2

★★★

NETFLIX
OUT **2 SEPTEMBER**
EPISODES VIEWED **1-6**

SHOWRUNNERS José Padilha, Eric Newman
CAST Wagner Moura, Boyd Holbrook, Pedro Pascal, Joanna Christie, Paulina Gaitan, Diego Cataño, Maurice Compte, Raúl Méndez

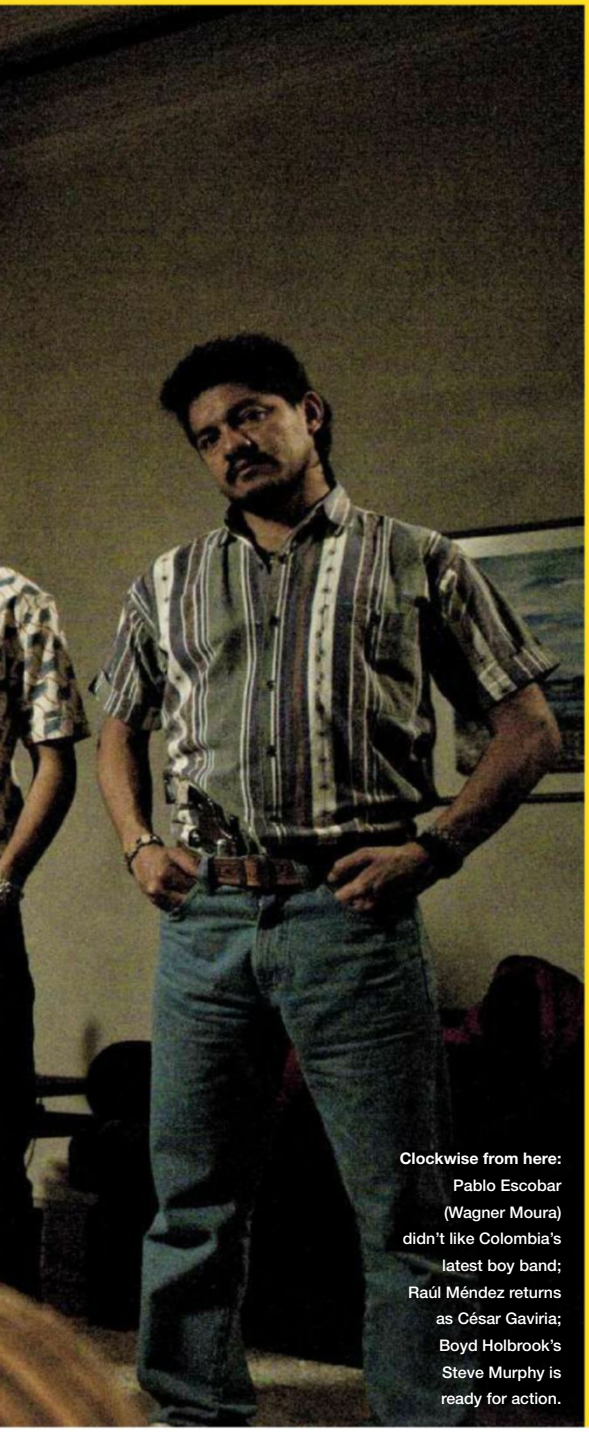
PLOT Pablo Escobar's (Moura) story continues where it left off, with his prison-cum-pleasuredome being invaded by "4,000 soldiers, a 250-man team of Colombia's elite forces, seven dogs and four fucking helicopters". When that's resolved we then follow him over the final 15 months of his life.

THE EVENTS OF Pablo Escobar's life are well documented. Netflix hasn't tried to hide them, either — splashing the events at the denouement of this series all over its advertising. But if you consider historical events — and frequently dramatised historical events at that — to be spoilers, now is the time to stop reading.

Pablo Escobar dies at the end of *Narcos*' second season. This is set in stone, simply because if the first ten episodes took us from his not-so-humble beginnings as a smuggler-turned-cocaine trafficker in the late '70s to his escape from the outrageous luxury of La Catedral prison in 1992, then that leaves just 15 months to play with until his death. It's never been 100 per cent confirmed exactly who fired the bullet that killed him — some of those closest to him insist that it was suicide — so there is at least that to keep us in suspense. But it does lend an air of finality to everything that happens this time around.

Netflix and the show's creators have recently intimated that they are still planning a third season of the show — citing a Damian Lewis-less *Homeland* as an example of how this could be viable. And for sure, the world's appetite for Colombia's most lucrative export did not cease in the mid-'90s. But even if you overlook the fact that the narcos who took over control of the drug trade were far less interesting characters — inheriting only the ruthlessness and none of the philanthropic posturing or ingenuity in manipulating people — it seems unlikely, on the evidence of the latest episodes, that *Narcos* the show would be as compelling without Wagner Moura as Pablo Escobar.

Right from the second season's opening moments when, deep in the jungle, he wanders slowly up to and then through a heavily armed contingent of the Colombian national army who've been ordered to take him in — "I cannot







Clockwise from here: Pablo Escobar (Wagner Moura) didn't like Colombia's latest boy band; Raúl Méndez returns as César Gaviria; Boyd Holbrook's Steve Murphy is ready for action.

allow that to happen. Excuse me," they are simply told — he owns every scene he is in. Time and again, sauntering out of hiding and silently into shot, every look, whether to a close associate or arch enemy, he exhibits an understated air of menace. Moura's potency as Escobar has obviously been recognised by the show's creators as their main strength: he now gets substantially more screen time than DEA agents Steve Murphy (Boyd Holbrook) and Javier Peña (Pedro Pascal), both of whom are reduced to what are essentially supporting roles, replete with troubled personal lives and other cop show clichés. Via a voiceover that increasingly feels superfluous, the former — it comes as no surprise whatsoever to learn — confides he is secretly pleased his target has eluded capture, and that, "The fox is out of the cage," for him to chase after once more.

The re-introduction, three episodes in, of Colonel Horatio Carrillo (Maurice Compte) — and his unhinged, ultra-violent methods of fighting back against Escobar — initially feels like it might be an exciting counterpoint to Moura's performance, but it is not allowed to develop. Similarly, the narrative arcs of new characters often feel undernourished and predictable. Quite soon in, an innocent young woman plays a key role in Escobar's new method of getting around Medellín without detection. She is assured by the enforcer who recruited her that she has nothing to worry about. What feels like seconds later, she is in hiding, fearing for her life.

Meanwhile, the scenes featuring political figures discussing what they are going to do about Escobar, and those featuring rival cocaine barons discussing what *they* are going to do about Escobar, feel endless. You find yourself just waiting for the subject of their discussions to return to screen. And whenever he does, that's when the show sparks into life. The nagging feeling is there's just not enough story here — what could easily have been tied up in two hours is instead stretched over another ten. With his rise to prominence, his attempts to break into politics and the Palace Of Justice siege already covered, the only truly significant event left in Pablo Escobar's life is his death. And it feels a long time coming.

Narcos continues to be as stylishly made as its first season was, but there are only so many holdalls being hurriedly stuffed full of cash, brutal murders or hushed phone calls that we really need to see. **HAMISH MACBAIN**

VERDICT Slickly made with a compelling lead, but much like talking to people who overuse Pablo Escobar's most famous product, *Narcos*' second season feels like it goes on much longer than it needs to.



TV & STREAMING

THE NIGHT OF

★★★★

SKY ATLANTIC/SKY BOX SETS
OUT **1 SEPTEMBER**
EPISODES VIEWED 1-7

DIRECTORS Steve Zaillian, Richard Price
CAST John Turturro, Riz Ahmed, Michael Kenneth Williams, Bill Camp, Jeannie Berlin

PLOT After borrowing his dad's cab, New York college student Naz (Ahmed) has a wild night with a troubled girl. He wakes up with gaps in his memory, finds she has been murdered and seems destined for a life in prison until an unconventional defence attorney (Turturro) takes his case.

AMERICAN REMAKES OF acclaimed British TV shows arrive with such frequency that you'd think they were sure things rather than a wild roll of the creative dice. When they fail, they fail big (*Absolutely Fabulous*, *Life On Mars*, the infamously awful unaired *Spaced* pilot). But the few that do work (the US version of *The Office*, say) have the potential to soar even higher than their source material, and *The Night Of* — a mesmerising near-masterpiece from HBO — falls resoundingly into this second category.

Even its journey to the screen is the stuff of drama. Based on the Ben Whishaw-powered first series of Peter Moffat's *Criminal Justice*, this New York-set adaptation was initially optioned as a vehicle for James Gandolfini in 2012, with novelist and Oscar-nominated screenwriter Richard Price providing the creative vision alongside lead director Steven Zaillian. Following Gandolfini's 2013 death, he was briefly replaced by Robert De Niro, only for scheduling conflicts to put the show back on hold until John Turturro signed on to finally harpoon this small-screen white whale.

The result is an eight-parter — seven were made available for review — that feels a fitting tribute, not just to the man who gave us Tony Soprano (Gandolfini gets a posthumous executive producer credit) but the glittering legacy of that Mob drama. The grabby premise of the BBC original is mostly intact — mild-mannered kid has drug-addled night out with girl, wakes to find her murdered with no memory of how it happened, is chewed up by the justice system — with some key, timely improvements.

Here, our luckless protagonist is Naz Khan (Riz Ahmed, anchoring his breakthrough year with the bug-eyed soulfulness of *The Godfather*-era Pacino), a Muslim college kid whose indictment for the vicious stabbing of a telegenic Upper West Side tearaway called Andrea has an extra wrinkle of post-9/11 paranoia and racial profiling. Naz looks doomed until John Stone (Turturro), an idiosyncratic legal huckster with crippling eczema, swoops to his aid.

From its agonising showstopper of a first episode onwards, *The Night Of* glories in the details that other crime shows skip and deftly subverts clichés ("You're not puking. Tell me you're not puking," says an older cop to a queasy rookie at the crime scene). Zaillian, who wrote *Schindler's List* and the remake of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, directs all but one episode and has a Fincher-ish eye for colour, light and characterful close-ups. As Naz awaits trial — and perhaps hints he's not all he initially seemed — Zaillian deploys a rinsed palette that tallies well with the shades of grey in this world of rigged bureaucratic games and impossible moral choices.

The cast — ranging from *The Wire*'s Michael Kenneth Williams as a feared Rikers kingpin to *The Darjeeling Limited*'s Amara Karan playing an inexperienced lawyer — is rich with pleasures, but Turturro is truly a revelation. With his crumpled trench coat, taste for boiled eggs and inflamed, sandal-clad feet, Stone could easily be a pile of irritating tics. But Turturro imbues *The Night Of*'s shoeless gumshoe hero with multilayered warmth, hangdog weariness and a healthy serving of wit. Zaillian sounds keen on a second series focusing on a separate case. If there's any justice, it will happen. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT A dazzling hybrid of police procedural, courtroom thriller, prison drama and noir mystery that's stuffed with spectacular performances and is utterly engrossing from the first frame.



WOLF CREEK

★★★★

FOX / STARTS **10PM, 30 AUGUST**
SHOWRUNNER Greg McLean
CAST John Jarratt, Lucy Fry, Dustin Clare

WHEN AUSSIE SERIAL killer Mick Taylor (Jarratt) slaughters yet another tourist family before the opening credits of episode one, the safe money seems to be on this TV spin on *Wolf Creek* covering ground well worn by the first two films. Twist is, this time someone survives, and now all Eve (Fry) has to live for is revenge. Splitting this six-part series between Mick's murder spree and Eve's slow-burning quest for vengeance keeps things moving reasonably well, though some of the middle episodes drag. The kills are enjoyably gory, but it's the performances — Fry is a standout, while Jarratt maintains his gleeful energy from the films — that really shine. **AM**



QUARRY

★★★★

SKY ATLANTIC / STARTS **SEPTEMBER TBC**
DIRECTOR Greg Yaitanes
CAST Logan Marshall-Green, Jodi Balfour, Peter Mullan, Nikki Amuka-Bird

WHEN MAC (MARSHALL-Green) returns home from fighting in the Vietnam War, he's greeted not as a hero but instead as a child-killing national shame. Nobody will employ him and it seems his reward for his service will be a life of poverty, until he and a fellow soldier are approached by a shady stranger (Mullan, an absolute treat in a meaty villain role) who suggests that if they're already branded ruthless murderers, they should consider killing for him, in return for payment. It's a rich premise, but it's the characters, not plot twists, that make this addictive. Just about any one of them could carry the show, as they reveal complex inner workings. Even the ones you may have written off as filler. **OR**

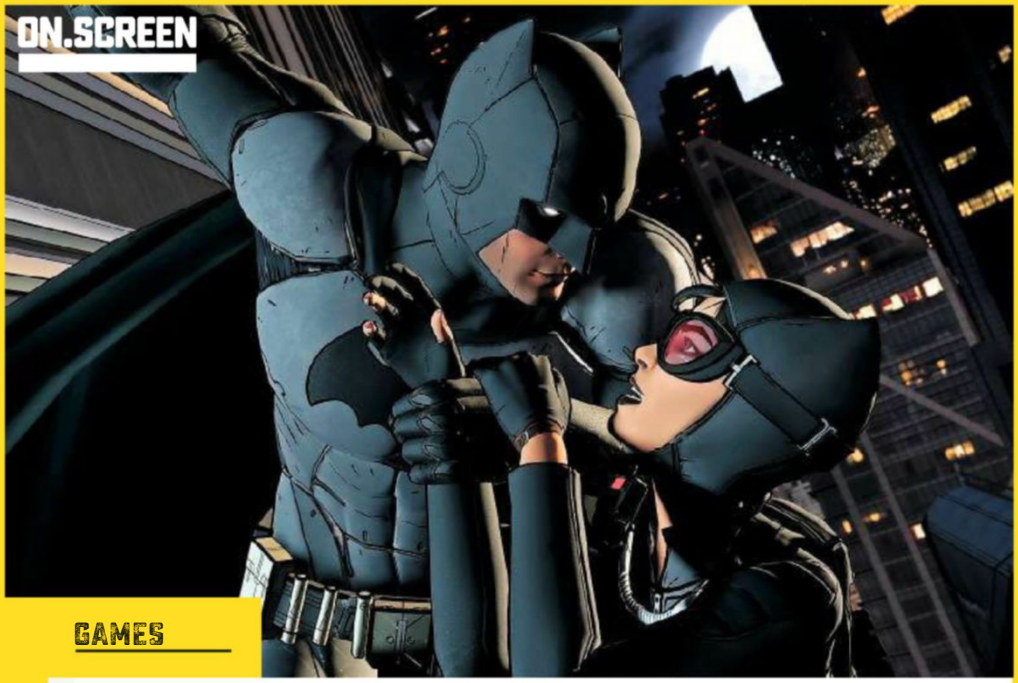


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BATMAN: THE TELLTALE SERIES – EPISODE 1

★★★★

OUT **NOW**
FORMATS: **MAC, PC, PS3, PS4, 360, XB1**

DIRECTOR Kent Mudle
CAST Troy Baker, Laura Bailey, Travis Willingham

PLOT After turning down an offer from crime boss Carmine Falcone, Bruce Wayne (Baker) finds his manor ransacked and his family under investigation by the Gotham police. Meanwhile, an altercation at a warehouse points to a larger conspiracy that only the World's Greatest Detective can unravel.

WITH A FOILED heist, plenty of beaten-up thugs, and a showdown between Batman and Catwoman, the opening of Telltale Games' latest series provides an appropriately spectacular introduction to this iteration of Gotham's Dark Knight. But even with a liberal flinging of batarangs and verbal sparring between Bat and Cat, the action-packed prologue is overshadowed by a low-key scene with Bruce Wayne and Selina Kyle conversing at an outdoor café.

Following the previous night's fisticuffs, the pair find themselves forced to tolerate each other over coffee. The exchange is playful, as they suss out who the other actually is. Things go from spirited to serious quickly, however, when the business of the previous evening is broached and a potentially dangerous deal is struck.

It's here, in the interplay between characters, that Telltale has always shone. Whether it's Rhys and Fiona trading barbs in *Tales From The Borderlands* or quiet moments between Lee and Clementine in *The Walking Dead*, the developer has consistently shown its writing to be a cut above. *Batman* is no different, and the war of words is made all the more engaging as players can shape its direction. As in Telltale's previous games, *Batman*'s best moments unfold when the user has to make morally ambiguous decisions within a time limit. Key choices, we are reminded, are remembered by the character they're directed at, potentially impacting on the narrative several episodes on.

Harvey Dent, Carmine Falcone, Vicki Vale, and even Alfred Pennyworth also find themselves engaged in plot-steering conversations with Batman's more presentable alter-ego. Seeds for an especially promising subplot are planted in a Gotham park, where Wayne and Oswald Cobblepot politely catch up before parting ways when words grow tense. Having possibly offended the latter with our dialogue decisions, we left this particular scene wondering if our arrogance would lead to a showdown with an emboldened Penguin.

Not all conversations carry weight, of course, but being inside Bruce's brain offers a welcome fresh perspective. Gotham's future won't alter based on your decision to tell Ms Vale whether the red smudge on Bruce's collar is blood, lipstick or wine, for example, but participating in the innocent flirtation is far more enjoyable than tossing a batarang by following an on-screen prompt.

Indeed, tackling combat and detective work from under the cowl is rarely as thrilling. Not straying far from Telltale's signature gameplay foundation, interactions are limited to light exploration and mimicking moves that appear on screen. You'll piece together clues and pound on baddies, but serviceable and visually impressive as these moments are, they wouldn't be nearly compelling enough to carry the game on their own.

Of course, if you're craving heart-pounding action in a Telltale game, you're in the wrong Batcave. For cracking heads as the Caped Crusader, you're better off with Rocksteady Studios' trio of *Arkham* titles. However, if you'd rather try donning Bruce Wayne's natty dinner suits than get your hands dirty as Gotham's avenger, then Telltale's five-episode series opens with an often engrossing glimpse at what the billionaire gets up to when he's not responding to the Bat-Signal in the wee hours. **MATT CABRAL**

VERDICT A rare opportunity to hang up the utility belt for a while and navigate an absorbing Gotham adventure with Bruce's Wayne's brain rather than Batman's fists.



INSIDE

★★★★★

OUT **NOW** / **PC, PS4, XB1**
DIRECTOR Arnt Jensen

INSIDE STARTS WITH a nameless child running through the woods, pursued by men with guns. By its end, you'll have encountered mind-control, genetic experiments and vast conspiracies — all without a word being uttered. After a timed Microsoft exclusive in June, PS4 owners can now finally experience Playdead Games' follow-up to 2010's *Limbo*. It's a similar blend of 2.5D platforming and puzzle-solving and while the controls may be basic — just run, jump and interact with environmental objects — that in no way diminishes the delight (and shock) as you delve into its sinister world. Murky and oppressive, with a pervading sense of isolation and terror, *Inside* is more atmospheric than any number of games with ten times the budget. A minimalist masterpiece. **MK**



OVERCOOKED

★★★

OUT **NOW** / **PC, PS4, XB1**
DIRECTORS Phil Duncan, Oli De-Vine

THE END OF the world is nigh! The giant pasta god has devoured all! Only by placating its infernal hunger can the Onion Kingdom be saved! Surprisingly, not the set up to an oddball JRPG, but rather this couch-based multiplayer cooking game. Players navigate busy, themed kitchens, chopping and cooking ingredients, serving orders and washing dishes, all to build the skills to save the world via the medium of food. Equally surprising, it's hugely chaotic fun, although only with a full complement of four players. Anything less, and managing the flow of orders starts to feel like being Gordon Ramsay's commis on a particularly bad day — stressed, angry and about to explode. **MK**


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REBEL HEARTS

DIRECTOR GARETH EDWARDS REVEALS THE "FINE LINE" HE WALKED TO MAKE *ROGUE ONE* BOTH TRUE TO THE SAGA IT'S SPUN FROM, AND DIFFERENT FROM ANY *STAR WARS* STORY WE'VE SEEN BEFORE

WORDS **DAN JOLIN**





GARETH EDWARDS HAS A THEORY ABOUT THE TITLE OF HIS NEW MOVIE.

The director admits that he came up with it "on the spot", at the *Star Wars* Celebration fan event in London's ExCel Centre in July, where he and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy presented fresh glimpses of that film, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, to a 4,000-strong crowd. But it's a good theory, nevertheless.

"I had been thinking about it a while. Like, what *does* it mean? When we were brainstorming the titles, this was the one that stood out, and I think that was because, subconsciously, we realised it has multiple meanings."

On the surface, *Rogue One* is a military call sign, similar to those used by the pilots of the Rebel Alliance throughout the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Then, as Edwards puts it, this tale of the Rebel mission to filch the plans for planet-exploding megaweapon the Death Star, is "the first *Star Wars* film that's gone off-piste and is not part of the saga, so it's therefore the 'rogue' one, you know?" And finally, he sees it as a nod to its main character, Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones): a tough, fierce loner who's brought into the Rebel fold and required to channel her maverick energy for the benefit of the galaxy. "It's describing her as well, in a similar way," he says.

Empire suggests there may be a fourth level of meaning to *Rogue One*. It might just describe its director, too. Edwards shifts a little in his seat and gives an uncertain laugh. "I don't know... I never see myself that way. But, er... That'd be cool!" As he comes around to the idea, he cracks a grin that's half-rueful and half-mischievous. "We tried to do things differently, for sure."



Vader-style death troopers bring a new level of danger.



Director Gareth Edwards confabs with Diego Luna and Felicity Jones.



Riz Ahmed tools up as Rebel Alliance pilot Bodhi Rook.

THE CROWD-ADRENALISING images that played on the screen of the Celebration Stage were gritty and handheld, with a jittery, front-line immediacy that heralded a *Star Wars* movie unlike any we'd seen before. Imperial stormtroopers wading ominously through the turquoise waters of a paradisiacal beach in the Maldives (playing new planet Scarif). Erso and fellow rebels, including Diego Luna's cool charmer Cassian Andor, kick-bollock scrambling to escape sandblasting explosions. A lone child (a young Jyn, we suspect) running across a primordial plain in Iceland, the camera jogging along just behind her.

The directors of *Episodes V* and *VI*, Irving Kershner and Richard Marquand, had to match George Lucas' classical style. Lucas' own prequels dragged the opera less than satisfyingly into the digital arena (and into a literal opera, in *Revenge Of The Sith*). And JJ Abrams' *The Force Awakens* was all about re-establishing fidelity to the original vision. Now we have a 41-year-old from Nuneaton — the franchise's second British director, after Marquand — shaking everything up and giving us a whole new point of view on this 39-year-old saga.

"It's very much a boots-on-the-ground perspective of the *Star Wars* universe," Felicity Jones tells us. "The idea is that it feels as though you're actually *there*. You're in amongst it. We were always trying to find naturalism as much as possible, so if there were suddenly bangs going off, they'd actually have the bangs going off. You were constantly responding to real effects that were going on around you."

Riz Ahmed, who plays former Imperial pilot Bodhi Rook, one of her squad, shows *Empire* the dirt he still has under his fingernails from shooting amid those explosions the day before at Pinewood Studios (in mid-July, the production is still in the throes of additional shooting). "It is mucky, it is grimy, you're in the trenches," he says. "To bring that kind of *vérité* feel to this world, that kind of documentary realism, is really exciting."

That "*vérité* feel" comes at least partly from Edwards' directorial origins. In 2009, the one-time visual-effects artist darted around Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Mexico and Texas with a tiny crew, snatching footage like someone making a documentary — though in fact he was constructing *Monsters*, a science-fiction road movie complete with pylon-sized aliens.

That film propelled him onto the big studio stage and 2014's *Godzilla*, so it grabbed the attention of Kathleen Kennedy, keen to secure ›



Director Krennic (Ben Mendelsohn) likes to make an entrance.



Baze Malbus (Jiang Wen), freelance — or, some might say, 'rogue' assassin.

the best director for the first *Star Wars* universe stand-alone of this new era. "I had seen what Gareth had done with *Monsters*, and *Godzilla*," Kennedy says, "and I thought this style of filmmaking was really interesting and something that could give *Star Wars* a unique look. There's a way in which Gareth shoots his movies, where he literally puts the camera on his shoulder and he's looking through that lens himself. Many directors have to explain exactly what it is they want. But Gareth *finds* it. That's his process."

It's a process that saw this gargantuan production avoid green screen in favour of location shoots in Jordan, Iceland and The Maldives. Not to mention frantically shooting, guerilla-style, through the wee hours at Canary Wharf Tube station before the morning rush hour. That came about when Edwards was considering how to pull off an especially long shot of stormtroopers pounding down a corridor. The director recalled the Jubilee Line commute to his first TV job back in 2003, and how impressed he'd been by the station's futuristic architecture. He thought at the time, "If I ever get to do a sci-fi film in my life, I'm gonna film it here." With *Rogue One* he made that idle daydream a reality.

Not that much of the shoot felt "guerilla" to Edwards, at least in comparison to *Monsters*. He was particularly blown away, he says, by his art department. "Within an hour they'd transformed the whole [station]. It was like, 'This is amazing, how did you get so good at this?' And they said, 'Oh, we've been practising'." It turned out they'd gone in the night before, "top secretly", and dressed the whole platform. They built set elements that could cover all the London Underground signage and seating, then undressed the whole thing, to see how long it would take them. "That's the kind of craziness that happens on films like this. There's a lot of resources to get things right. So then you think, 'The pressure's on now. We gotta nail this, 'cause there's so much riding on this being good.'"

THE PRESSURE ON Edwards comes as much from his personal drive to *get this right* as from a professional concern to secure a worthy return on Lucasfilm and Disney's investment. "I genuinely did watch it every morning," he says of his childhood relationship with the first *Star Wars* movie. Not the whole thing, mind — he needed to get to school, so he didn't have time. But enough to lose his six-year-old self in this wondrous new world for a precious few minutes, to absorb it all and think, "I wanna get on that ship somehow. I wanna be part of that group. I wanna *do* this." He'd put in the Betamax tape, hit play, get as far as the droids crashing on Tatooine and have to stop it and go get educated (in a different way). "The next day, I'd rewind it and watch it again," he says. "I reckon I watched that opening 300 times."

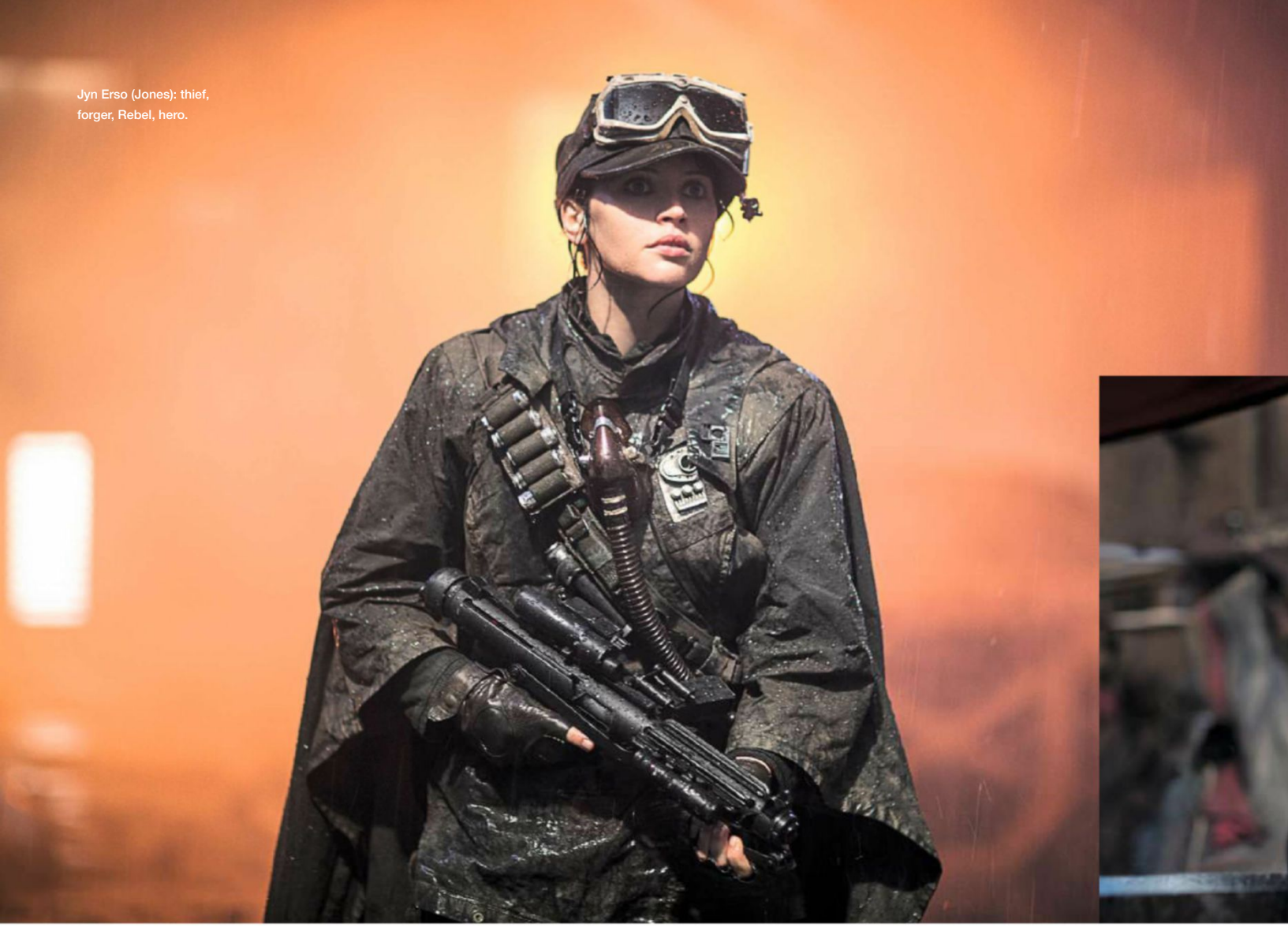
You can only imagine what kind of subconscious influence that must exert on him now, as the director tasked with turning one, crucial line of that opening crawl into an entire movie ("... During the battle, Rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to the Empire's ultimate weapon, the DEATH STAR..."). Edwards is also the first to call, "Action!" for Darth Vader since George Lucas himself on *Episode III* in 2005, since the Dark Lord of the Sith *will* be appearing in the film.

Edwards was first sent the outline for *Rogue One* by Lucasfilm's head of story Kiri Hart, late in 2013. He read it and instantly thought, "Whoa, is this sacrilegious? Is this hallowed turf?" Then, "Am *I* being considered for it, or is this an accident? Did they send me the wrong document?"

It was the first in a long series of 'pinch yourself' moments for the director — even now, close to the end of shooting. "I really am starting to wonder if this is all a virtual reality game and I'm playing the role of '*Star Wars* director'. And it's all gonna end soon, after the premiere maybe, and I'll be like, 'I *knew* it was all a dream.'"

Luckily his self-effacing sense of humour helps immeasurably in dealing with the pressure and questioning of reality. "I joke with Rian Johnson, who's directing *Episode VIII*, that *his* benchmark he's got to beat, because he's doing the second in a trilogy, is *Empire Strikes Back*. And our benchmark, because we're a stand-alone, is *Caravan Of Courage*."

Edwards even went so far as to put up a big poster of the best-forgotten 1984 *Ewok Adventure* film in his office, to "make me feel better about what the competition is". But it almost landed him in trouble when George Lucas came to visit. As the plaid-clad Grand Moff walked into the room, Edwards was mortified, fearing Lucas ›



Jyn Erso (Jones): thief, forger, Rebel, hero.

would think he was, well, taking the piss. "I was talking to him and trying to keep his back to the poster, pivoting around and trying to make sure he never saw it. I still don't know if he caught it or not..."

THERE ARE TWO other key posters decorating Edwards' office, neither of which would have bothered Lucas at all. Beijing-based actor Jiang Wen, who plays the big gun-toting hero Baze Malbus (half of a double act with martial-arts star Donnie Yen as the blind, Jedi-inspired warrior Chirrut Îmwe), recalls seeing them behind Edwards during their first Skype conversation about the film. "One of them was *Apocalypse Now*," Wen tells us. "One of them was *Star Wars*. He said, 'You know why? I want to make a film that feels like a real war, like *Apocalypse Now*, but which comes from *Star Wars*. So I understood his idea."

The truth is, there's only so far, far away Edwards can push his style from the hallowed source material. He can't go *completely* rogue. He might cite Alejandro G. Iñárritu's *Babel* as a key influence for its "beautiful naturalism", but *Empire* admits it can't imagine him getting all shaky and handheld up in Darth Vader's gloss-black grill. "Yeah," he laughs, "you've gotta know what you're doing when Vader turns up on set."

Rogue One, he says, will mix "organic, handheld-ish" sequences with the "stable and classical" style of the original trilogy — the latter employed mainly during the Imperial scenes, which also feature new power-player Orson Krennic (Ben Mendelsohn), director of the Empire's Advanced Weapons Research division.

"I really enjoyed trying to be closer to the style of *A New Hope* in those scenes," says Edwards. He harks back to those formative years watching that opening sequence on repeat, and confirms their subliminal force. "Just as you learn words when you're a kid, you learn shots from films. And then you find yourself emulating them when you're making your own films." But he also studied *Star Wars* closely as an adult, analysing every moment, figuring out what it is that makes it so indelible.

One thing in particular struck him about Vader's scenes. "No-one is allowed to have their eyeline higher than Vader in a shot," he says. "It's a weird thing. If Vader is further away than someone else and you're at head height, it makes the person closer bigger and that's a big no-no. Vader is always the tallest person in the scene."

Mendelsohn insists that *Rogue One* will slot perfectly alongside, and within, the bigger nine-part saga. "We are a little more down and dirty, but at the same time it fits right in that canon, as it should. I would hope that when this has all come together, after it's released, you'll be able to go, 'Oh yeah, *that's* how that goes now.' And I think in that regard it's a seamless addition."

Achieving this, says Edwards, involved walking "a really fine line". Early in pre-production, he explains, "we found if you go slightly to the left, it's not *Star Wars*, it's just some other sci-fi movie." But go too far the other way and "it just feels like you're doing a karaoke number of what George has already done."

His solution was to return to the source, to the Lucasfilm archives. Here, once he'd tired out his inner fanboy by trying on ancient prop helmets and holding a model of "the *actual* Millennium Falcon", Edwards gained access to what he calls "the equivalent of the Dead Sea Scrolls:" the original drawings by concept artist Ralph McQuarrie, which Lucas used to pitch what would become the 1977 movie. Rather than simply Xerox *A New Hope*'s look, he inked out his own using the same unrefined source art.

"There was this particular image of a stormtrooper," he recalls, "that felt really tall and skinny and looked cool and athletic. But when you put the armour on a normal person, they look fatter and a bit chunkier, like an NFL player. So we decided to get hold of seven-foot-tall, very



Jyn consults spiritual warrior-monk Chirrut Îmwe (Donnie Yen).



Jyn teams up with Cassian Andor (Luna). Andor's meant to be a steadying influence...

thin guys and create a stormtrooper outfit for them so they could have the look of these original drawings." After a black paint job, that became the death troopers, the Imperial Intelligence elite and Director Krennic's enforcers.

Edwards delved even further back than the archive too, to the movies that influenced Lucas. The characters of Baze and Chirrut arose from a fresh viewing of Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress*. That film's central duo, scoundrel peasants Tahei and Matashichi, originally inspired R2-D2 and C-3PO. "There's a lot of information about how George arrived at *A New Hope*, and what inspired him, and we just dialled it back and went into those things and froze them before they became *Star Wars*."

As Edwards talks about the joy of holding Luke's lightsaber ("his *actual* lightsaber"), or watching the dailies for *A New Hope* in which Dave Prowse's undubbed Vader speaks of "the Cosmic Force" in a West Country burr, he comes into sharp focus as the ideal blend of 'rogue' filmmaker and reverent fan. He may be bringing a gritty new look to *Star Wars*, but he's also a safe pair of hands — someone for whom a journey to that galaxy far, far away is very much a homecoming.

ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY IS IN CINEMAS FROM 16 DECEMBER

WHO'S THAT SPACE MONKEY?

Return Of The Jedi **gave us Admiral Ackbar of the Mon Calamari, but fish people are so 1983. Judging by the trailer, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* has a new scene-stealer...**



All hail new Ackbar, Bistan! Not much like a monkey.

Is that a Space Monkey?

That's the way the cast and crew referred to this character before he was given his official name, which is Bistan. He doesn't in fact look entirely simian: there's something mole-like about his eyes, and something of Doctor Who's Sontarans about his potato-shaped dome. We're told the hair under his jumpsuit is black, in contrast to his white facial whiskers.

What does Bistan do?

Plot-wise, his function in *Rogue One* is firmly under wraps (director Gareth Edwards says we don't "necessarily get to know" him, so he may be quite peripheral). But we know he's a door gunner on one of the newly revealed U-Wing vehicles. That means his eyesight's probably better than the whole "mole" thing might suggest.

U-Wing?

Yes, like an X-Wing or a Y-Wing… only in a U shape. These appear to be military people-carrier gunboats, used for dropping Rebellion troops into battle zones.

Where does Bistan come from?

He's a member of a new species called the Iakaru, never before seen or mentioned in any *Star Wars* media. His planet of origin is unknown at present, but we might infer somewhere with high gravity from his squat stature: early artwork shows him reaching just below shoulder height when standing next to Donnie Yen.

Is he a CG character?

No, he's a practical effect, performed by an actor in a suit (Nick Kellington). External techies are responsible for his animatronic face.

So he's a new kind of thing?

"The creatures have gone in a new direction led by Gareth Edwards," says creature designer/creature FX supervisor Neal Scanlan. No kidding! Think of Edwards as a Pied Piper, but with a much more interesting replacement for rats.

THE AUTUMN/WINTER PREVIEW



Deepwater Horizon

THE REAL-LIFE CHALLENGES OF RECREATING AN OIL RIG DISASTER

30 SEP

PAUL NEWMAN AND Steve McQueen thought they had it tough facing a skyscraper fire in *The Towering Inferno*. But they have nothing on the real-life disaster of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, as told in director Peter Berg and actor Mark Wahlberg's reunion after *Lone Survivor*. When the drilling rig in the Gulf Of Mexico exploded in flames on 20 April 2010, it was briefly the brightest spot on Earth as the crew scrambled first to contain the disaster and then to survive.

Yet at the time, the human tragedy was somewhat overlooked. "Like everybody, during



Things get explosive for Mike Williams (Mark Wahlberg), one of the crew stranded on the stricken offshore drilling rig, Deepwater Horizon.

the spill our focus was on this horrible environmental disaster," says Berg. "Then [American news show] *60 Minutes* did a piece with Mike Williams [Wahlberg's onscreen character], the last guy to get off the rig, and it was mesmerising. Everyone knows that a lot of birds and fish were killed, but 11 men were killed. And the story of those men trying to get out alive was a powerful one."

Just one problem: the crew were not permitted to shoot on a real rig. So Berg built his own, using two million pounds of steel, in a forest outside New Orleans. At 85 per cent scale and set in four million gallons of water, the rig had to be strong enough to land a helicopter for the crew's arrival, and then to withstand the huge jets of flame that the fire crew created, adding to the already blistering heat of the Louisiana summer. "The first thing for me is safety," says Berg. "It's a big, complicated film and the challenges are pretty legit."

He describes the film's first half as a "scientific thriller" where we meet the crew, learn about life on the rig, and spot clues that something may be about to go wrong. Then comes the disaster. Kurt Russell and *The Maze Runner*'s Dylan O'Brien joined Wahlberg on the crew, with John Malkovich as a BP executive and *Jane The Virgin*'s Gina Rodriguez as the rig's navigator.

"Pete's very fast; he knows what he wants and he knows how to get it," says Wahlberg of his director. "But there are times when I think, not only are those comedies I do fun, but they're a bit easier on the body."

It's a sentiment that chimes with Berg. "I keep joking that one day I'm going to do a romantic comedy on a beach with a girl and a boy and a bottle of wine," he says. "But I keep ending up with a bunch of men fighting for their lives. I just want to go to France with a camera and some Bordeaux." **HELEN O'HARA**



Doctor Strange

IS THIS THE TRIPPIEST SUPERHERO FILM EVER?

28 OCT

WHEN HE SAW the latest footage from Marvel's *Doctor Strange* at San Diego Comic-Con earlier this summer, star Benedict Cumberbatch was stunned. "Some bits made me think, 'Wow. God. That's what I'm part of.'"

It's not that the actor didn't know it would be large scale and effects heavy. "You have conceptual art that they show you, but you only really realise what you're part of at the end of the process. That's not to say I didn't enjoy the effects while we were shooting, because a lot of them were real elements, whether it was sets that make a room minuscule or the costume designs."

Doctor Strange is, of course, a Manhattan surgeon whose hands are crippled after a car accident, closing off his profession. He travels the world in search of a cure and instead finds Tilda Swinton's Ancient One, who initiates Strange in the mystical arts. Those arts, on the evidence we've seen so far, include turning the world into your own personal kaleidoscope. "It started with the Ditko comics," explains director Scott Derrickson of the visuals. "It was taking a hard look at everything that had been done in the '60s and early '70s, and looking for imagery that had never been put on screen, things that were uniquely Doctor Strange."

With those images comes a different tone. "It's a darker, more serious and yet weirder movie than any of them," says Derrickson. "It has a grounded, dramatic quality, coupled with psychedelic visuals, that I feel the Marvel Cinematic Universe needs."

The film's magical vision looks quite different from the rest of the MCU, even if Strange himself — an egotist who gains wisdom and becomes a hero — has echoes of other Marvel leads (Iron Man, Thor, Peter Quill). But director Scott Derrickson has no doubt his hero will stand out. "As spectacular as the visuals are, the best thing about the movie is Benedict Cumberbatch," he claims. "It's about one guy, and his performance is a journey through a gauntlet of pain as we witness the sublimation of this guy's ego."

"The lure as an actor is the script," says Cumberbatch, "the director, Kevin [Feige], and talking about how to make a character written in the '60s and '70s relevant now. To make him slightly less arrogant. Arrogant, but also humorous." Amid the spectacle Cumberbatch was particularly pleased that a small moment, where Strange swirls his signature red cape onto his shoulders like a more flamboyant version of *The West Wing*'s President Bartlet, was well received. "It was wonderful to see that moment get a cheer. He's really earned it by then."

Still wondering how to prepare yourself for something that looks this weird? "Listen to the first two Pink Floyd albums," recommends Derrickson. "And *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper* by The Beatles. Fire up the lava lamp, ingest whatever you ingest and be ready for *Doctor Strange*." This one should be far out, man.

NICK DE SEMLYEN



Strange behaviour: Chiwetel Ejiofor and Benedict Cumberbatch star as Baron Karl Mordo and the titular doctor, Stephen.



Katherine Kelly and Sophie Hopkins defend the cracks in the Whoniverse.

Class

THE NEW *DOCTOR WHO* SPIN-OFF MIXES ALIENS AND ADOLESCENT ANGST

TBC OCT

DOCTOR WHO HAS already had spin-offs with *Torchwood* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. Now we get *Class*, a sort of time travel-tinged *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* with more aliens and fewer hellbeasts.

Created by Patrick Ness, author of young adult hits *A Monster Calls* and the *Chaos Walking* trilogy, it's set at Coal Hill Academy in London. "Coal Hill has existed in *Doctor Who* since literally episode one," says Ness. "The Doctor's granddaughter went there. So we thought, 'All that time activity at the school, has that caused any problems? What do you know, it has!'" The boundaries of space-time have been stretched to breaking point, allowing all manner of monsters through. That's a lot to deal with when you're already facing the teenage horrors of sex, social anxiety and uncertain futures.

Ness created a core cast of four pupils, of mixed gender, race and sexuality, and built stories combining the perils of teenage life with a fantasy environment. "We're not telling stories of the 'chosen ones'," he says. "It's happenstance that puts these people [at the centre of things]. What if your timing is just weird and things happen to you? How do you deal with it? I'm interested in real consequences. The Doctor is always exciting, but he never *faints*. He goes off on the next adventure. What happens to real people?" Almost certainly, something very, very weird. **OR**



First-time actress Sasha Lane as law-bending free spirit Star.

American Honey

HOW A TOTAL UNKNOWN BECAME THE STAR OF ANDREA ARNOLD'S ROAD-TRIP DRAMA...

14 OCT

STAR QUALITY IS a funny thing. As the lead in *American Honey*, opposite Shia LaBeouf and Riley Keough, director Andrea Arnold chose a total unknown, a psychology student with no acting experience. "Literally, Andrea came up to me on the beach as I was spring-breaking in Florida," laughs 20-year-old Sasha Lane. "I had *no idea* who she was. But she had this really calming energy, so I didn't sense any weirdness."

Lane's own attitude sealed the deal to play Star. "It had been a long week," she recalls. "I was in a very 'fuck it'-type mood. I was like, 'Cool, I'm down. You seem nice.' Which I don't recommend all the time, but it worked."

This "fuck it"-type mood came in handy for Star, a girl who hits the road to sell dodgy magazine subscriptions and start flashmobs in backwater supermarkets, in a heavily improvised journey. "All I knew was what Andrea told me," says Lane. "She said, 'You come from a really bad background and you look after your siblings.' Star's pretty much me. Impulsive, a little bit naive, a lot of strength."

"I'm so proud of it," adds Lane. "Working with all the kids, my God, their souls really got to shine through. *My* soul got to shine through." So far audiences agree: the film was a critical hit at this year's Cannes, with Lane's performance hailed as the standout in a lustrous hymn to youth and crazy summers. **DW**

THE AUTUMN/WINTER PREVIEW



Miles Teller as world champion boxer Vinny Pazienza.

Bleed For This

A TRUE-LIFE TALE THAT DEMANDED TRANSFORMATION

28 OCT

THERE COMES A time in every serious young actor's career when he contemplates playing a boxer. Blame *Raging Bull*. But taking on the role of a fighter marks a readiness to mix with the big boys — especially if his life story is impossibly dramatic. That's the case for Miles Teller, starring as Vinny 'Paz' Pazienza in director Ben Younger's sports biopic.

"This story isn't well known, even among people who love boxing. But you know it's a true story because it's too unbelievable for fiction," says Younger (who made finance thriller *Boiler Room*). "Miles is one of those incredibly dedicated actors who learned boxing and transformed himself for this role."

Pazienza is a real-life world-champion boxer whose career seemed over when a car crash left him with a broken neck. Doctors suggested an operation that would repair the damage but end his career, but Pazienza refused, opting to have an enormous head brace called a "halo" screwed into his skull while he continued his fight training against doctor's orders. Teller quit bread and alcohol for eight months to look convincing as the middleweight boxer, as well as enduring fight training for four hours a day, plus additional weights and fitness work.

He's joined by Ciarán Hinds as Vinny's swaggering dad Angelo and an unrecognisable Aaron Eckhart as Kevin, his trainer — complete with shaved bald patch and a selection of terrible tracksuits. "Aaron is going to surprise people," says Younger. "A director who has worked with Aaron saw this film and it took him 15 minutes to recognise him."

And still, the film struggles to contain the true story, Younger claims. "I actually had to tone *down* these characters. Over the end credits I put up video of the real-life Angelo. You may have thought that Ciarán Hinds was giving a broad performance, but when you see the real man you'll realise he's really dialling it back." OR



Jack Reacher: Never Go Back

THE ONE-MAN ARMY ENLISTS A NEW PARTNER

21 OCT

JACK REACHER: MAVERICK. Hero. Legend. A former military cop who now wanders the highways and lowways of America, he keeps himself to himself, says very little, and breaks a lot of criminal bones. And he prefers to do it alone.

But in *Jack Reacher: Never Go Back*, the second film based on Lee Child's incredibly popular novels, Tom Cruise's Reacher teams up with Cobie Smulders' Major Susan Turner, who's taken over Reacher's old position at the head of the 110th MP unit. After striking up a flirtatious friendship over the phone, Reacher heads to West Virginia to take Turner out to dinner — only to find that she's been arrested on a trumped-up charge. As for Reacher, he's drafted back into the army (that explains the title) on similarly shaky grounds and threatened with court martial himself. Faced with a spell in chokey, Reacher has just one option: bust himself and Turner out, then



Tom Cruise returns as Jack Reacher in the second outing for Lee Child's ex-military officer with a thirst for justice.

go on the run to clear their names. Along the way, Reacher discovers another blast from the past: it turns out he may have a daughter, in the shape of Danika Yarosh's Samantha. "Reacher's self-contained. He's a loner," says Edward Zwick, who takes over the directorial reins from Christopher McQuarrie this time. "To see him put in these relationships is fascinating. It's about a certain intensity of relationship with other people that wasn't quite happening in the other film."

Unlike 2012's *Jack Reacher*, based on the ninth book in Child's series, *Never Go Back*, which is based on the 18th (presumably the series will be put on hold until Child finishes the 27th novel sometime in 2022), expands Reacher's horizons. "It humanises him in an interesting way," adds Zwick, who last directed Cruise in 2003's *The Last Samurai*. "We show Reacher to be extremely competent and smart and forward-moving, but there's a little bit of fallibility in this, which is kinda fun."

Yet, like *Jack Reacher*, it still promises to be carved from a different block of marble than your average modern blockbuster. There won't be a cape in sight. There won't be any huge explosions. Cruise won't be clinging to the side of a plane as it takes off, just for shits and giggles. "Reacher is not Ethan Hunt," says Zwick. "He's a very different kind of character. He's a little bit more internal, and there's greater stillness to him."

Not to worry, though: this isn't going to be exclusively about Reacher getting in touch with his feelings. There's still plenty of punching, kicking and kick-punching. Not to mention Reacher getting all kinds of inventive with a salt shaker. Never go back? He'll be the judge of that. CHRIS HEWITT



Trolls

WHY A PINK TROLL MAY BE AUTUMN'S TOUGHEST LEAD

21 OCT

"SHE'S GOT A little psycho in her," says Anna Kendrick of Poppy, her perky pink character in DreamWorks Animation's *Trolls*. Inspired by the collectable '90s toys with the crazy hair — now spun into wildly colourful characters and an entirely new plot — *Trolls* sees Poppy attempting to rescue kidnapped friends. Her quest involves singing and — in a kids' animation first — passing through the digestive tracts of several large beasts.

"Every time I came in and tried to do a cutesy character, our producer would [say], 'Don't do a voice. Do your own voice'," says Kendrick. "Her dialogue is so peppy that it's hard not to go cartoony, but it was a nice surprise that the more I sounded like myself, the more that character worked. She's definitely got some fight." This hero may be bright pink, and small, but she's got it where it counts, kid. HOH



Humans: Season 2

CHANNEL 4'S PHILOSOPHICAL SCI-FI IS GOING GLOBAL

TBC OCT

THE NEW SERIES of the acclaimed *Humans* will widen its examination of human-robot relations. "Last series was all about suburban London," explains producer Chris Fry, "but it's a more global affair now: we're in Berlin, South America, San Francisco."

The key difference between *Humans* and our world is the presence of android "synths", causing instant social upheaval. "We've done the hard work introducing the characters," Fry explains, "so this time we can tell a multi-stranded narrative. There's the same thriller element, [and] humour, emotion and action, but the things I love are those meaty philosophical issues."

Fry has a clear idea why Season 2 will work. "I can turn on the news and see stories about AI that are really close to Series 2. We try to keep it grounded and not go too far with the sci-fi." But with its new worldwide focus, the ramifications of these beings are only going to get bigger. OW

THE AUTUMN/WINTER PREVIEW



Chess prodigy Phiona (Madina Nalwanga) with mum Harriet (Lupita Nyong'o).

Queen Of Katwe

A CHESS DRAMA CHRONICLES A TRIUMPH OVER THE ODDS, ON SCREEN AND OFF

21 OCT

FILMMAKER MIRA NAIR calls Queen Of Katwe "the first Disney movie made in Africa not to feature any animals — except perhaps the occasional chicken." Nor does the film include princesses, though it does have plenty of kings and queens. Little wooden ones. It's the story of Phiona Mutesi, a girl from a Ugandan slum who one day wandered into a chess club mostly, as Nair puts it, "because they were offering free porridge", and discovered a gift for the game that would bring her international fame and change her life.

The Indian-American Nair, who has lived in Uganda for years (her husband is a Ugandan academic), was attracted to the project for any number of reasons. "If we don't tell our stories, no-one else will," she says. "I loved that it was about a girl and that it shows us that genius is everywhere, but that you have to be open to seeing it and nourishing it into being."

Nair's cast includes newcomer Madina Nalwanga as Phiona, who was discovered in a dance troupe, and Lupita Nyong'o. Playing Phiona's mother Harriet, this will be Nyong'o's first onscreen appearance since winning her Oscar for *12 Years A Slave*, having only lent her voice to some pixels in *Star Wars* and *The Jungle Book*. Though it's the first time Nyong'o and Nair have collaborated on film, it's not the first time they've worked together. "She used to be my assistant!" laughs Nair. "She was an intern in my production company in New York, when I was making *The Namesake*. To see everything that has happened to her in just a few years, it's wonderful... I wrote the role for her, and she's *fabulous*."

But Nyong'o's triumphant rise has nothing on Phiona's own. "Phiona's story tells us that it's not only possible for *white* people to triumph against all odds, but also that it takes a village to make a winner. If it weren't for Coach Katende [David Oyelowo] showing her how to play chess and harnessing her ability, which far exceeded his own, her story would be very different." OR

Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them

WHAT WE CAN GLEAN FROM THE MOST IMPORTANT WIZARDING TOOL: THE WAND





Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne) and Porpentina Goldstein (Katherine Waterston) on the trail of some fantastic beasts. **Bottom left:** Jacob Kowalski (Dan Fogler) raises a glass to glamorous witch Queenie Goldstein.



18 NOV

THERE ARE PLENTY of reasons why an actor would sign up to star in *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*. There's the opportunity to wander the magical world of JK Rowling. There are the majestic sets designed by *Harry Potter* veteran Stuart Craig. There are bills to pay. But above all, we suspect, there's the chance they might get to swish a wand around.

"Nothing could cut into the excitement I got when the prop department said to me, 'Here's a wand you can take back to your hotel room to practise,'" says Colin Farrell, who plays Percival Graves, a kind of magical G-man on the hunt for hero Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne). "I took that little wooden thing home and had a little fiddle around with it in front of the mirror straight away. I'm a big kid in so many ways. Give me a wand instead of an M16 any day."

Any Muggle worth their salt knows the stats on Harry Potter's wonder-stick: 11 inches long, made from a holly tree, phoenix-feather core. The wands in *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* are equally tailored to their owners. Newt's has a seashell grip grafted onto ashwood, reflecting his ease with nature and globe-travelling history. The one belonging to glamorous witch Queenie Goldstein (Alison Sudol), whom Newt befriends when he arrives in New York City, is black with a flashy pearl-shell end and gold embroidery.

Queenie's sister Porpentina, a low-ranking employee at the Magical Congress of the United States of America (MACUSA for short), is more understated than her sibling, a fact reflected by her unadorned spell-caster. "Tina's a plain Jane, so the wand should match the girl," says Katherine Waterston. "We actually got to choose our own one. I had four or five options that were all great, but in the *Harry Potter* world the wand chooses you. So I thought it would be interesting if she was given a wand that didn't confirm her potential as a witch. She's asking herself: 'Am I as average as people think I am, or do I have something more inside to give?'"

With a sequel already set for 2018, the 1920s-set *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* is the launch of a huge new adventure. Expect incredible spectacle as all manner of flying, crawling and snuffling things escape from Newt's suitcase and storm the Big Apple. There will be political machinations as a mysterious senator (Josh Cowdery) rises to power. And, if the visual-effects guys have done their job, spells will fly left, right and centre. "I sure hope so," frets Farrell, "because I thrusted that wand before me with absolute vigour and commitment. I hope they spend a few euros on it."

NICK DE SEMLYEN



THE AUTUMN/WINTER PREVIEW

American Pastoral

HOW A FIRST-TIME DIRECTOR, ONE EWAN MCGREGOR, ADAPTED A PULITZER PRIZE-WINNER

11 NOV

EWAN MCGREGOR WAS long attached to star in a film adaptation of Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*, but the film struggled to find a director. After a third or fourth prospect departed McGregor worried that the project might die and with it his chance to play 'the Swede', a former high-school star athlete whose life is torn apart when his daughter (Dakota Fanning) becomes involved with radical 1960s domestic terrorists. "When I thought the film was not going to get made I was gutted. There was something about the father-daughter story, that I just couldn't give up," he says. "And my agent in LA — who I'd been asking to get me something to direct for years — went, 'Maybe the answer's right in front of your nose.'"

First, McGregor needed to be sure he had a director's take on the material. "On my day off [from Broadway play *The Real Thing*] I made a big pot of coffee and spent all day with the script thinking, 'Can I do this? Do I really *see* the film?' By the end of the day I was really jazzed about it."

He pitched himself to the execs at Lionsgate, who were receptive but worried that the budget, and risk, were too high for a debutant director. But after struggling on a little further in the search for the right name, they came back to their star. "They went, 'Okay, we'll reduce the budget, we'll move the dates from March to September, and you can direct it.' I was just floored! Then the reality sunk in. I thought, 'Fuck! Now I've got to do it!'"

McGregor called his favourite directors for advice, in particular Don Cheadle, who directed his own lead performance opposite McGregor in *Miles Ahead*. His dual experience was helpful because McGregor also stars in the movie opposite Jennifer Connelly, as the Swede's beauty-queen wife, and a supporting cast that includes David Strathairn and Rupert Evans. But most notably, perhaps, there's the pressure of the material itself.

"It's fucking daunting, directing a Philip Roth novel," McGregor admits. "It's a difficult one to adapt because there's so many contradictory points of view, but that's really what I wanted for the film. I wanted people to see different sides of arguments, and be respectful of what I thought Roth was doing there; I didn't want anything to be black and white. It's too complicated a story for that."

So with the film locked and headed to the Toronto International Film Festival in October, how was his first directing experience? "I'm very happy with it and I don't believe that's always the case with directors. So that's either my naivety or it's very good, I don't know!" Worst-case scenario, McGregor finally got a film he was passionate about off his to-do list. Best-case, he could just have launched himself on a whole new career. HOH



Jake Gyllenhaal's Tony Hastings stars in his own bizarre story-within-a-story.

Nocturnal Animals

DIRECTOR TOM FORD EXPLAINS WHY HE TOOK SO LONG TO FOLLOW UP HIS DEBUT FILM

04 NOV

IT'S BEEN SEVEN long years since designer Tom Ford premiered *A Single Man*, his first film as director, and emerged as a promising filmmaking talent. "I've been pretty busy," Ford says of the delay. "We've launched womenswear, a cosmetics divisions and, most importantly, I had a son... Then, of course, it takes a while to find the right project."

That project is an adaptation of a 1993 novel by Austin Wright. It follows Susan (Amy Adams), sent a manuscript by Tony, the man she divorced long ago (Jake Gyllenhaal). Tony's story tells Susan exactly what he thinks about the way she ended their relationship. The film recounts the couple's real lives but also his fictional narrative, with a cast that includes Laura Linney, Isla Fisher and Michael Shannon.

"I liked the way the situation forces this woman to look at her choices," says Ford. "We live in a very throwaway culture. We throw away things, friends, relationships... This woman threw away the great love of her life."

Nocturnal Animals is, in that sense, a significant leap in scale. "*A Single Man* was more a tone poem," he says, "[This is] much more complex. But, you know, I felt extremely comfortable when I was making *A Single Man* and I felt just as comfortable making this." An encouraging sign that, even after seven years, it will prove worth the wait. **OR**



Ewan McGregor's 'the Swede' and Jennifer Connelly's Dawn watch their perfect life disintegrate in McGregor's directorial debut.



Billy Bob Thornton's Willie is back in the Christmas spirit.

Bad Santa 2

THE RAUNCHY CHRISTMAS CLASSIC IS BACK, AND EVEN WORSE. IN A GOOD WAY

25 NOV

IF 2003'S *BAD Santa* was the feel-bad seasonal comedy of the century, we might expect the sequel to be feel-worse. But, promises director Mark Waters, the curmudgeonly sequel — like the first — is far from un-festive. "The first one is a lot of people's favourite holiday movie," he laughs. "It just kind of snuck up on people and there's real heart at its centre."

Not usually one to repeat himself, Billy Bob Thornton was keen to reprise Willie Soke once the right concept appeared. This new story introduces Kathy Bates as Willie's "awful" mother, bringing him in on a job intended to rob a Chicago charity of its Yuletide proceeds. Bates is only eight years older than Thornton, but the film finesses the issue by suggesting she got pregnant *very* young. "This movie is definitely raunchier and dirtier than the first one," claims Waters. "Everything but animals and children is fair game. Willie is an equal-opportunities offender and insulter."

Also back in action is Tony Cox's long-suffering Marcus as Willie's elf-costumed co-conspirator. But the returning cast's most significant coup is Brett Kelly, reprising his role as Thurman Merman.

"There's just something great about having given that character 13 years to grow up," says Waters. "Brett's been to college and he's just a normal guy now. But he pulled a bit of a De Niro for this: he gained 40 or 50lb and dyed and curled his hair. Before he really was just a clueless kid, but this is a real performance!" **OW**



Pecs appeal: Michael Fassbender as pumped-up Callum Lynch, ready to step into his ancestor's shoes and take on the role of Master Assassin, Aguilar.



Assassin's Creed

HOW DIRECTOR JUSTIN KURZEL PIVOTED FROM *MACBETH* TO MAKE A VIDEO-GAME BLOCKBUSTER

26 DEC

"I THINK WE all have this fantasy that eventually we'll have a Criterion Collection of our work," laughs Justin Kurzel. "And I think there are filmmakers who are strictly auteurs like that. But I gravitate to directors who really surprise you by the choices they make. There's something curious about their work. They don't seem to repeat themselves."

Few directors have proved more surprising than the Australian himself. It seemed hard to imagine a more abrupt change of direction than that from hardcore real-life serial killer story *Snowtown* to last year's handsome take on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. But now Kurzel has followed *that* with an adaptation of video-game *Assassin's Creed*, a franchise that has sold over 78 million copies worldwide. Arguably there is a thematic link, in that all three deal with mentally fractured men facing extreme violence, but the question still remains: how does a serious filmmaker like Kurzel take such a well-loved property and turn it into the blockbuster that the fans want?

His experience in adapting a beloved text is useful, though *Assassin's Creed* gamers are considerably more vocal than Shakespeare scholars. And Kurzel has sidestepped a few complaints by creating a new hero and plot for the film, rather than adapting a specific chapter of the game. Now new character Callum Lynch (Michael Fassbender) is sent back to explore the memories of his killer ancestors, to further the ends of Marion Cotillard's Abstergo (the corporate front of the Knights Templar).

But Kurzel's real focus is on giving the game as much reality as possible. The modern-day sequences were largely shot at Pinewood, but the period pieces were done on location in Valetta, Malta — its searing heat and spectacular architecture should give the film the texture of a Ridley Scott picture. The scale is significantly bigger than anything Kurzel has done before. "You can't help but notice," the softly spoken director told *Empire* on set in September 2015. "I'm surrounded by 900 extras today and there's the pressure to get through a whole lot of stuff. But at the same time there's Richard [Whelan, first assistant director] who worked on *Macbeth*, Adam [Arkapaw, cinematographer] who worked on *Macbeth* and *Snowtown*. So it feels familiar, which is great."

As a giant, baying crowd gathered to watch Fassbender face the brutal Inquisition and the air grew hotter, Kurzel remained unfazed. "There have been a couple of times I've pinched myself and gone, 'Wow.' I mean, I've never used a drone before in my life and in two weeks I've used them five, six times. But at the end of the day it's storytelling and framing."

Those drones have been flying above Valetta as Fassbender runs over roofs executing as much of the game's unique daring acrobatics as possible. The canvas may be bigger, and the genre different, but Kurzel is still determined to give his films a bloody, believable stamp that is all his own. **NEV PIERCE**

THE AUTUMN/WINTER PREVIEW



Passengers

THE TRICK TO MAKING RELATABLE SCI-FI? KEEP IT HUMAN

23 DEC

"IT TAKES PLACE in the future, but hopefully it's timeless," says Chris Pratt of his latest foray into science-fiction. *Passengers* is set aboard a luxury spaceship on a one-way, 120-year journey to Homestead Colony, a trip made possible by that sci-fi staple: hibernation pods. Things get interesting when two pods open several decades early, belonging to steerage-class mechanic Jim Preston (Pratt) and upper-class writer Aurora Dunn (Jennifer Lawrence). Their relationship, alone on a perilous voyage, is the film's focus.

"I like to say this is *Titanic* meets *Gravity*, in that the relationship is so strong and the visuals are so amazing," claims producer Neal H Moritz. "Even though it's set in the future, we want to have a relatability to it. Deep down it's a story about immigrants." Donald Trump will be appalled. Hooray! IF



Moana

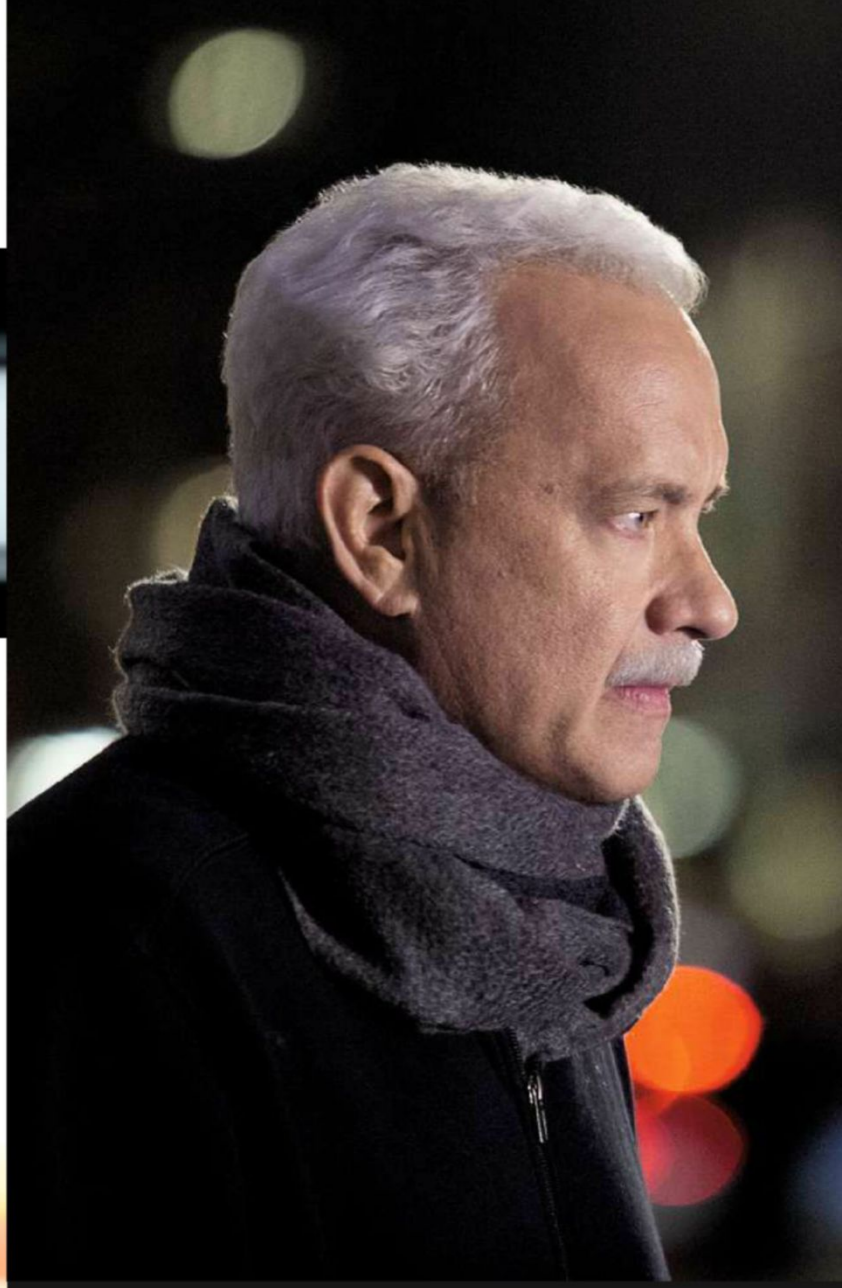
DISNEY'S LATEST HAS A DISTINCTLY BROADWAY FLAVOUR

02 DEC

WHEN JOHN MUSKER and Ron Clements made *The Little Mermaid* in 1989, they brought *Little Shop Of Horrors*' Alan Menken and Howard Ashman aboard to give the tunes some edge. Repeating the trick for *Moana*, they've recruited Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Miranda is the most sought-after composer in the world right now after creating *Hamilton*, a wildly successful hip-hop musical about one of America's founding fathers. But Musker and Clements could offer an inducement that few could match: their leading man, The Rock. "Lin is a big Dwayne Johnson and wrestling fan," laughs Clements. Johnson plays Maui, the demi-god who helps Moana (Auli'i Cravalho) on her quest to save the South Pacific.

With Miranda aboard and, we're assured, Johnson and Cravalho's good singing voices, expect the music to take root in your brainstem. HOH



Sully

TOM HANKS LEARNS HOW AND WHEN TO CRASH A PLANE

02 DEC

THE FIRST TIME Tom Hanks met Chesley B Sullenberger, the pilot Hanks plays in *Sully*, he dropped an almighty clanger. The actor was explaining to the pilot how Clint Eastwood's movie will condense, omit and outright change the events surrounding the crash of US Airways Flight 1549 into New York's Hudson River on January 15, 2009. It was at this point that Sullenberger stopped the world's nicest man in his tracks.

"It wasn't a crash," he said quietly. "It was a forced water landing."

While much of *Sully*'s drama revolves around the trials Sullenberger went through post-January 15 — the subsequent hearings investigating his decision — Eastwood and his crew put every effort into getting the "forced water landing" right. Like all modern forms of research, Eastwood started on YouTube examining different aviation disasters. "There was one in South America and the wing went in a little early and they tumbled this huge plane," he says. "They lost quite a few people. When you see those [incidents], you think, Sully's pretty good." Given that cinema is full of stunningly realised crashes, be it *United 93*, *Flight* or Hanks' own *Cast Away*, did Eastwood check out the competition?



Tense moments for Tom Hanks and Aaron Eckhart as Captain Chesley B 'Sully' Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles.

"No," he says tersely. "I watched the one with 'Don't call me Shirley'."

While Eastwood was checking out *Airplane!*, Hanks did his own prep. En route from La Guardia airport to Charlotte, North Carolina, Sully's plane had been struck by a flock of geese, taking out two engines. To get a slice of how that felt, Hanks, with co-star Aaron Eckhart, sat in a flight simulator, undergoing an exact recreation of Sully's journey.

"It's very lifelike," says Hanks. "The physicality of it is just like being in flight. Your equilibrium starts going a little wacky. The visuals are good enough so your brain tricks you that you are actually doing it."

Hanks says that what happened aboard Flight 1549 is played out "like an accordion" across the film, meaning more and more is revealed until the whole thing plays out in context. Eastwood has gone to rigorous lengths to inject a reality check, from getting the actual first responders on the scene as extras to giving the script to Sullenberger to weed out the plane-movie clichés.

"We wanted to be authentic," confirms Hanks. "[Screenwriter] Todd Komarnicki wrote that Sully is yanking back on the stick. Well, it's hydraulics, it's computers, so the controls for the entire plane are just like that [*does a slight shift of a joystick*]."

Having spent so much time recreating Sully's travails has given the pair a newfound respect for flight crew and the safety of air travel.

"I think there's a bigger danger of getting in a fistfight with the asshole in seat 70A than from physical harm from the plane itself," says Hanks. "I kind of dig turbulence. I'm like 'Oooh, that was fun.'"

Just the sort of man you want in a crash. Or forced water landing. **IAN FREER**



Kate McKinnon, Jason Bateman, TJ Miller and Olivia Munn get festive.

Office Christmas Party

THE RECIPE FOR A PERFECTLY DISASTROUS SHINDIG

09 DEC

WHEN DIRECTORS JOSH Gordon and Will Speck (*Blades Of Glory*, *The Switch*) pitched their new movie, *everyone* had ideas for them. "When you say you're making a movie about office Christmas parties people come out of the woodwork and start giving you material," says Gordon.

"We pitched it to DreamWorks," adds Speck, "and I think because Spielberg had a lot of office parties back when he was at Amblin we were off and running. It's a night rife with danger; you're always one drink away from ruining the rest of your life."

They built a story about a company led by Jennifer Aniston's CEO, who plans on shutting down her brother's (TJ Miller) division. But if Miller's staff can snag a key client with one great holiday bash, they may be able to stay open. "The trick of a good party movie is you want just enough plot to hang the movie on, but you also don't want to overwhelm it," says Gordon. "The star of the movie is the party, so you want to go with that energy."

Cue heavy drinking, heavy petting, ill-advised indoor sled rides and — for reasons that are not yet clear — a live reindeer. With a cast that includes Jason Bateman, Kate McKinnon, Olivia Munn, Rob Corddry, Jillian Bell and Randall Park, energy shouldn't be a problem. "It was a snowball of talent," says Speck of the casting process.

Shooting started in Chicago in March, where a final snowstorm provided a little festive sparkle, before moving to humid Atlanta for the interiors. "We wanted to make a great Christmas movie that is just arrived at through an R-rated comedy," is how Gordon puts it. "It's kind of the only night of the year when you live honestly. Even though there's all this mayhem and destruction, there's also smaller moments of opportunity and breakthrough. It has a heart." And, you know, also a reindeer. **HOH**



A Monster Calls

LIAM NEESON BECOMES A TREE MONSTER FOR ONE OF THE MOST GROWN-UP KIDS' FILMS YOU'LL SEE

06 JAN

IMAGINE A COMBINATION of Groot and Gareth Edwards' *Godzilla* with a gruff, no-nonsense manner, and you're in the ballpark for Liam Neeson's Monster in Juan Antonio Bayona's latest. He's an impossibly ancient tree creature that wades into the life of Lewis MacDougall's Connor after his mother (Felicity Jones) is diagnosed with cancer. Patrick Ness' screenplay, adapted from his own brilliant bestselling book, sketches the relationship between the brooding, angry Connor and the gruff, unforgiving Monster as a dark, complex, mature affair.

Empire met the Monster — sort of — on a bitterly cold January night at the Parc Audiovisual de Catalunya. The former TB hospital on the outskirts of Barcelona has been temporarily transformed into a typically English back garden. There's green patio furniture, a swing, and a 30-foot Liam Neeson bellowing at a young boy. "I will be listened to," he says, at the top of his voice. "I am as old as this land..."

Neeson, of course, is big, but he's not *that* big. Nor was he actually present. Instead, the Northern Irish actor's voice emanated from a series of speakers, while his bulk was represented by a series of crosses on a giant blue screen, all the better for Bayona's FX crew to add the eponymous entity.

But as it turns out, the story is not about him anyway. "The monster is the second-most important character in the film," says Bayona, who'll be staying in the land of lumbering giants with his next film, *Jurassic World 2*. "You have Connor, and you have the Monster. The Monster reflects the idea of the unknown, and the movie plays with the idea of mystery and where do we come from. It's very emotional."

In the scene *Empire* saw, the Monster appears to Connor and promises to tell him one of three pivotal stories (which will appear in animated form in the finished film). "Let me tell you the tale of the end of a wicked



Liam Neeson's Monster offers advice to ornery teen Connor (Lewis MacDougall).

queen," boomed Neeson's disembodied voice. "And how I made sure she was never seen again."

Bayona, whose previous movies *The Orphanage* and *The Impossible* also dealt beautifully with weighty themes of life, death and growing up, sees *A Monster Calls* as the capper for what he calls "sort of a trilogy. It's a story about a kid and a relationship with his mother, and you have death on the horizon. It's the kind of story I like to do; it's about instinct rather than choice." Death, illness and monsters? This is not your typical kids' movie. Get ready for the Big Unfriendly Giant. **CHRIS HEWITT**



Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling in Damien Chazelle's third feature.

La La Land

HOW *WHIPLASH* ALLOWED DAMIEN CHAZELLE TO MAKE A REALISTIC SORT OF MUSICAL

13 JAN

FACED WITH THE question of how to follow the massively acclaimed *Whiplash*, Damien Chazelle knew his answer at once. A musical! "I'd been working on *La La Land* since 2010," he explains to *Empire*. "I was toying with the script while my friend Justin Hurwitz came up with musical ideas. It was hard to get off the ground, but *Whiplash* allowed it to happen — much to the horror of some of the executives we brought it to. It was a tough sell, but they took the gamble."

La La Land stars Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone (with support from *Whiplash* star JK Simmons) as a jazz pianist and an actress falling in love in Los Angeles. But Chazelle wanted to keep it real and avoid too much spectacle or glitz. His touchstones were films like *The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg*, musicals rooted in the French New Wave, that offered an alternative to the Hollywood glamour of the '30s and '40s. "Those films are more about a grounded worldview and a sense of really being," he says. "They're not wall-to-wall music, so you never lose the everyday life of the characters. They'd still function without the songs. They're less formally presentational and more about emotions being expressed through song when the moment feels right. That idea to me is so beautiful. I wanted to try and recapture it."

Both leads had to learn some complicated choreography (backwards in high heels for Stone, of course) while Gosling also had to look genuinely proficient as a pianist. And while some scenes were performed to playback, the more intimate moments were sung live, without recourse to any modern trickery like Auto-Tune. "It was important to feel their presence in the room," Chazelle tells us, "so they both knew what sort of challenge it would be and they both took to it very naturally. They were definitely outside their comfort zone, and they were nervous, but also excited by the challenge. There was magic in the air on the set on those days." **OW**



American Gods

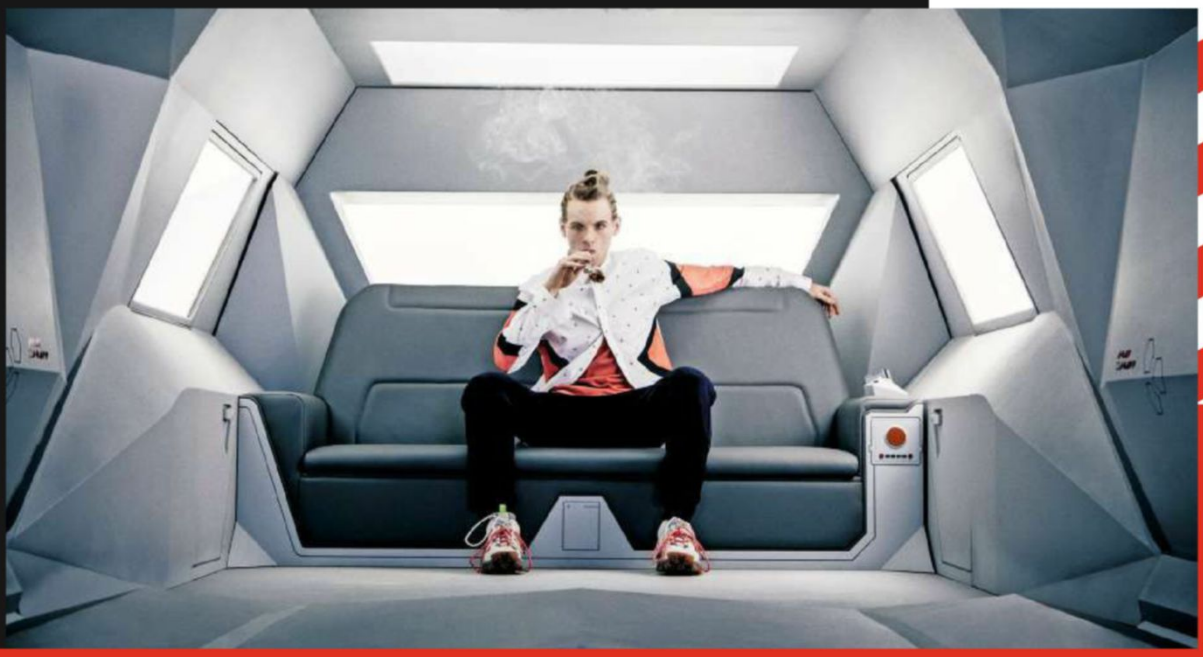
ADAPTING NEIL GAIMAN'S CULT NOVEL IS JUST THE BEGINNING FOR 2017'S HOT NEW SERIES

TBC JAN

BRYAN FULLER FIRST read Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* in 2003 when he was working on the pilot for dark comedy-drama show *Dead Like Me*. "I loved the world almost more than the [plot] because it was such a glorious toy box. It felt like the first step in so many great stories."

The story of *American Gods* follows ex-con Shadow (*The 100*'s Ricky Whittle), released from prison early when his wife (Emily Browning) is killed in a car accident. With all his hopes for a happy reunion destroyed, the desolate Shadow accepts a job offer from the mysterious Mr Wednesday (Ian McShane). Gradually, he learns that ancient gods live around the US, brought to the New World with their believers but abandoned to fend for themselves in an increasingly horrible world.





Ian McShane and Ricky Whittle as Mr Wednesday and Shadow; Shadow with Mad Sweeney (Pablo Schreiber); Bruce Langley's Technical Boy.

The book is a Hugo and Nebula award-winner and a fantasy favourite, so it's no surprise that an adaptation has been in the works since 2011, when HBO attempted it in the wake of *Game Of Thrones*' success. Over two years and three writers they couldn't find a script they were happy with. Production company Fremantle and then the US Starz network picked it up in 2014 and brought Fuller aboard as showrunner while he was still finishing work on *Hannibal*. Crucially, he conceived an approach that would work as a multi-season narrative — using his idea that the book is really a toy box.

"We want to craft a Marvel Universe with many different mythologies of higher beings," says Fuller. "We're taking our sweet time with the storytelling. Slow down the story as much as you can stand, and let the audience enjoy it. [We're] executing a meticulous weave of characters and storylines, really getting into the nooks and crannies."

This first season sees Mr Wednesday and Shadow recruiting strange people all over the United States to a mysterious cause. Only gradually does it become clear to the sceptical Shadow that these people are ancient beings: the Babylonian goddess Bilquis (Yetide Badaki), the Egyptian Mr Ibis (Demore Barnes), the African spider god Anansi (Orlando Jones) and enormous leprechaun Mad Sweeney (Pablo Schreiber) among them. Their enemies are a new breed of American deity worshipped in the modern age, like Media (Gillian Anderson) and Technical Boy (Bruce Langley).

"The series tells the tale of an atheist who becomes an agnostic who becomes a believer who becomes a zealot who becomes a demi-god who becomes a god. That's your series arc. We get through one of those steps in the first season." In terms of the book's story, says Fuller, that's "not even a quarter of the way through," Shadow's progress speeding up as he goes. But, he assures us, that's a good thing.

"We open the door to magic slowly, [and] use the flashier side of being a god judiciously. What we really need is to make them relatable as people struggling to make it in modern America, to allow the audience into their world. I always describe the book as *Clash Of The Titans* meets *The Grifters*."

Gods turned hustlers? A hulking atheist in their midst? Giant leprechauns? Expect this to be the strangest, wildest TV show of next year. **ED GROSS**



Jim Hosking's feature debut, *The Greasy Strangler*, was described as a "relentless monstrosity" on its Sundance debut earlier this year. It's also wildly original and packed with prosthetic penises. Here, in an exclusive piece, Hosking explains exactly what the hell he was thinking

WORDS **JIM HOSKING**





Where do you start when you're trying to write about the making of *The Greasy Strangler?* What *is* a greasy strangler? Somebody who has trouble strangling because his hands are so slippery? No. He is a very good strangler. Trust me. Yes, he has greasy hands — or greasy gloves, to be precise. But he can strangle you until your eyes pop out of your skull, pally.

Not so long ago I sent an email to my co-writer, Toby Harvard. I told him I wanted to write a script for our favourite 'actor', Carl Solomon [title star of web series *Hal The Pervert Ghost*]. I wanted to write a star vehicle for the world's least likely star. Toby replied that Carl could be a "greasy strangler". I replied with three words in capital letters: *THE GREASY STRANGLER*. Soon a script was written by the two of us, a script to provide light and laughter in our otherwise dark and troubled lives.

Ultimately, Carl would appear in *The Greasy Strangler* as the mysterious shapeshifter, Danny The Crooner. This is because Carl has seen over 600 Grateful Dead shows and his cerebral synapses are slightly frazzled —it's rendered his speech so deadpan that it is impossible for an audience to maintain concentration throughout the lengthy monologues that pepper *The Greasy Strangler* script. So a veteran of the San Diego punk scene was cast as Big Ronnie instead — but all this shall be revealed momentarily.

Enough about the writing. Let us move on to the realisation.

I started my preparation for the film by designing the prosthetic penises for [the two central characters] Big Ronnie and Big Brayden. I imagined a child drawing a mouse's head. I'm talking triangular member and balls to either side in place of the mouse's ears. If you're finding this hard to follow then you need to see the film — which is also the point of this article, in one sense. But in another sense this article is to give you a flavour, a whiff if you will, of *Eau de Étrangleur*.

Anyway, back to the prosthetic penises. I developed the mouse's head idea. I then briefed the penis sculptors. It may have been a low-budget production compared to that huge *Star Wars* film about the Force awakening, but that film lacked a penis sculptor, and I think if they had had one then I, for one, might actually have enjoyed it more. Anyway, I digress.

So I briefed the penises and, lo and behold, the penises were sculpted. They didn't look realistic to me. They weren't meant to. But many people have said, "IS THAT BIG RONNIE'S ACTUAL PENIS?" Although I am worried for these people, and for the penises that they may have ever owned or experienced, I shall attempt to provide a cogent answer. The answer to this question is half yes and half no. Big Ronnie had to plug the

Clockwise from left: One ill-fated individual meets his greasy end; Dad Big Ronnie (Michael St Michaels), son Big Brayden and Janet (Elizabeth De Razzo) form an unlikely love triangle; The gang let it all hang out; Writer-director Jim Hosking (centre) preps another lard-laced family meal.







prosthetic member with his actual manhood so, in fact, what you see is what you get, and what you get is a real one in a fake one. But in the case of Big Brayden, or should I say not-so-Big Brayden, his was tucked underneath the prosthetic and then carefully in post-production all traces of his real appendage were removed and the viewer is left with a seamless, absolutely authentic-looking, fake little mouse's head.

At this point you might be saying, "Is this article going to be entirely about penises?" No it is bloody well not.

I would like to inform you that Big Brayden is Big Ronnie's son. They live together in a filthy, squalid yet strangely beautiful house. Big Brayden's chief delight in life is to cook his father unbelievably greasy food. The food must lubricate Ronnie's throat so that he can feel it shining it as it goes down.

Thus one of the world's most inexperienced bedroom athletes was born. Come in Big Brayden, it is the hour for you to perform, finally, in the single bed that you have so successfully not used for over 40 years. Or is it 50? It's so hard to tell with actors. Brayden was played by a man whose name is Sky Elobar. Sky is a massive fan of Dire Straits and Korean burritos. So now you've met Sky and soon you will meet Michael St Michaels, who plays Big Ronnie.

Where did I find these guys? I found Michael in a previous casting for another forthcoming project, in fact. He looked abundantly professorial. I thought, "There's a man who needs to set himself free." I proposed that he should play Big Ronnie, and he said, "I will do anything that is required of me" — although when he tucked his legs behind his head and spoke to his son on camera "from another place" he was apparently unhappy to have done so publicly, but felt that it was necessary for the film. And so he revealed absolutely everything for his art.

There, in a nutshell, was the casting process for *TGS*: people who you haven't heard of who are prepared to do anything on camera.

I wanted unknowns. I wanted to create a world you hadn't seen before. I know quite a few of these people in LA, and with the help of the casting directors we built up a cast of relative unknowns and underdogs. Of course they had to be fantastic, and they were and they are. But they also had to be up for anything. This film had to go further than others, and it had to do so gleefully and unapologetically.

Right, so that's casting. Then we started location scouting. We needed an absolutely filthy old house that was occupied by a hoarder who didn't like cleaning and hated all signs of modernity. Theo [Brooks], our line producer, struck the jackpot when he wandered into a house in West Adams in Downtown Los Angeles. It was dusty. It was unsanitary. And yes, the owner would let Big Ronnie swing his massive mouse's head all over the house. We would soon be able to commence production. ›







Finally we could relax, and forget the other weird houses with the even weirder owners. Yes, I am thinking about you, gang house with the massive blood stain on the sitting room carpet and you too, pâté-eating twins whose house smelled of 15-year-old rancid ham hock terrine. And I'm not talking just about the smell emanating from the water closet.

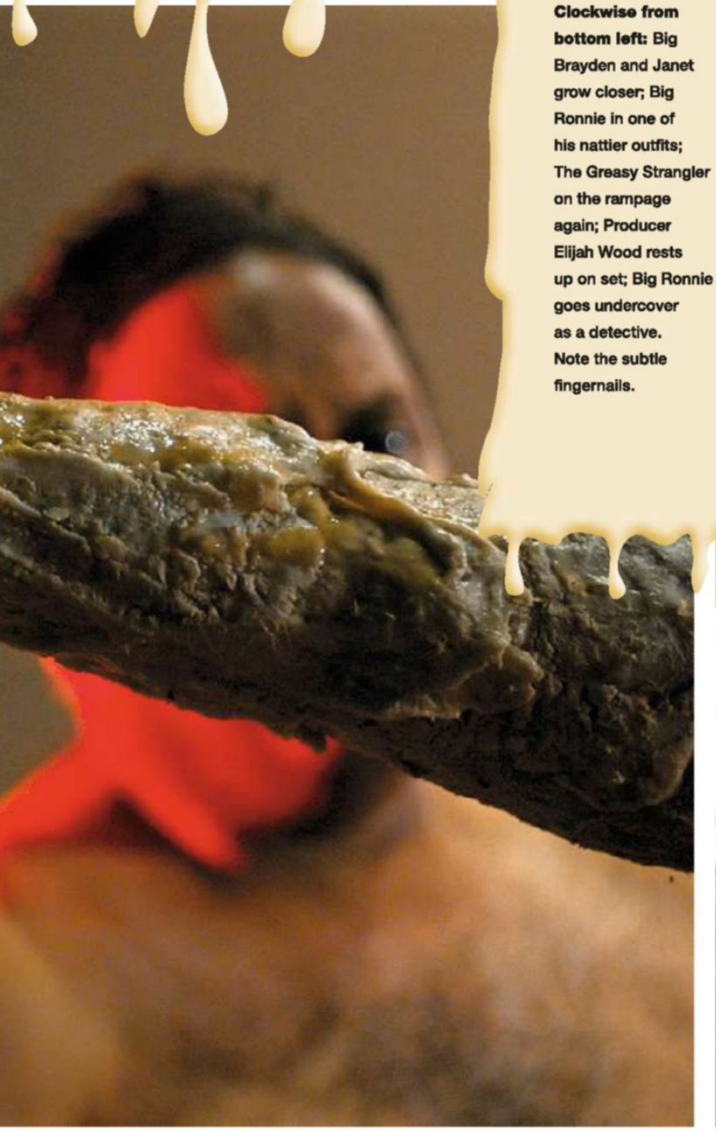
Working on *TGS* was a challenge for the nostrils and the nerves. Whether we were dealing with the application of massive merkins or copious litres of grease to naked old men in Hollywood motel car parks, stomachs churned as the cameras turned. Actually, the *camera* turned. Singular. This was *The Greasy Strangler*. No expense spent. If you're looking to read about a high-budget production, please direct your eyes elsewhere in this publication.

What else can I tell you? I can tell you that fluorescent lights that are left burning for too long smell like pickled fish. But I can also tell you that this film was the product of a collective of serious artists. This may have been reported as the most disturbing film of the year, but every detail was lovingly created and all conversations were absolutely serious.

Okay, that's not entirely true. But what is true is that people slave away on films like this for the sheer joy of it. You put two lead male actors with bountiful bouncy hair (and they wondered why they got the parts) on the streets of downtown Los Angeles at five in the morning, set them free to run down the street in nothing but orthopaedic footwear, their bodies rippling and flapping in the fetid breeze, as garbage trucks drive past honking at them and shouting at them — this is what keeps crews smiling through the long, lubed-up days.

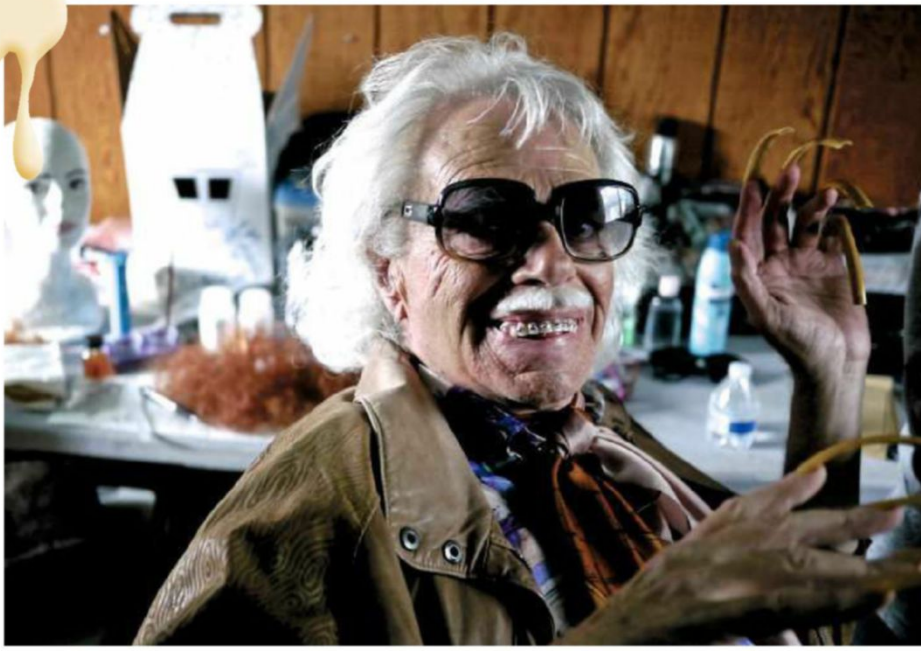
Michael St Michaels makes up for what he lacks in teeth with an abundance of Pall Mall cigarettes. As the FX team applied a substance called Magic Ice to Michael's most private regions, and he transformed into a greasy strangler, it was customary to see him smoking, shivering, and waxing effusive about how grateful he was to still be alive and still be working. At times it felt like he was glad to simply be working, regardless of the specifics of the project, but I doubt that. He was born to be Big Ronnie. Once you see him dancing down a spotlit street in his disco costume, with its special diamond-shaped mesh-window allowing viewing of his 'members only' area, you will see why his performance has brought many to tears. As wild as this film may be, it also has a lion's heart. I wanted to give the people who don't normally get the limelight in life a real platform for self-expression. It's a beautiful thing. *The Greasy Strangler* is all about that. Liberated expression. Freedom. A safe place to let it all hang out, with no consequences. Except that it has been filmed and will forever dangle itself above our heads, and we shall never be free from the shameful shadow that this dangling casts upon us.

I was so lucky to work with an incredibly supportive team of producers. Andy Starke and Ben Wheatley from Rook Films jumped on first, then Ant



Clockwise from bottom left: Big Brayden and Janet grow closer; Big Ronnie in one of his nattier outfits; The Greasy Strangler on the rampage again; Producer Elijah Wood rests up on set; Big Ronnie goes undercover as a detective. Note the subtle fingernails.





Timpson and Tim League from the *ABCs Of Death 2*. I did a segment for that film, called *G Is For Grandad*. Then Ant sent the script to Elijah Wood and SpectreVision, and they jumped on board. The film was very quickly into pre-production.

I was given freedom with casting, with all decisions really. I was given a lot of advice, and I heeded what made sense to me. But I also felt that this film had to have a strong, unique voice. I didn't want to make a film for everyone. I wanted to make a film for people like me, who like seeing stuff that's different and stuff that is doing its own thing. Try to put anxiety and logic somewhere else for a few months. Go with instinct. I collaborated with similar minds who embraced the twisted flow of some diseased internal logic, as if *The Greasy Strangler* himself was leading us all to the beat of his very own drum.

He doesn't have a drum. He does however have a lot of very greasy sausages every morning for breakfast.

I also had the thrill of working with Andrew Hung from the band Fuck Buttons. Andrew did the music, and he said a very sweet thing to me. He said, "You're a good director, Jim, because you leave a lot of space for people to express themselves." Well, I don't know if that's true, but I like the sound of it.

It wasn't like shooting *Apocalypse Now*; no actor had a heart attack and nearly died. But when we started shooting, on the first day I shouted out, "Okay, does everybody know what they're doing?" Michael St Michaels replied, "If I knew what I was doing I wouldn't be here." And that's true. And his teeth also fell out at the end of the first take.

Our first screening was on 22 January at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah. None of the actors had seen it. The three leads joined me for the Q&A afterwards. The room was in shock. Nobody knew what to think. (People felt like that when they first saw Van Gogh's paintings. That's why he cut his ear off.) Charlie Reff from Sundance asked the actors what they thought of the film. After a tense 20 seconds of silence Sky, who played Brayden, replied, "Wow. Disgusting."

However, since then Sky has told me that he was only disgusted by his own graphic nudity and in fact finds the film to be the most beautiful film he has ever seen. He puts it up there with Dire Straits.

So what more can be said?

I'll leave the last words to the first question I received at the Salt Lake City screening at the Sundance Film Festival at the end of January 2016.

"What the hell did I just see?"

THE GREASY STRANGLER **IS IN CINEMAS FROM 7 OCTOBER. WATCH AN EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW SCREENING AT EMPIRE LIVE — VISIT EMPIRELIVE.COM FOR MORE DETAILS**

DE CONSTRUCTING STONE

He's been hailed as a genius, a provocateur and something of a taskmaster — and that's just by his friends. We go in search of the real Oliver Stone...

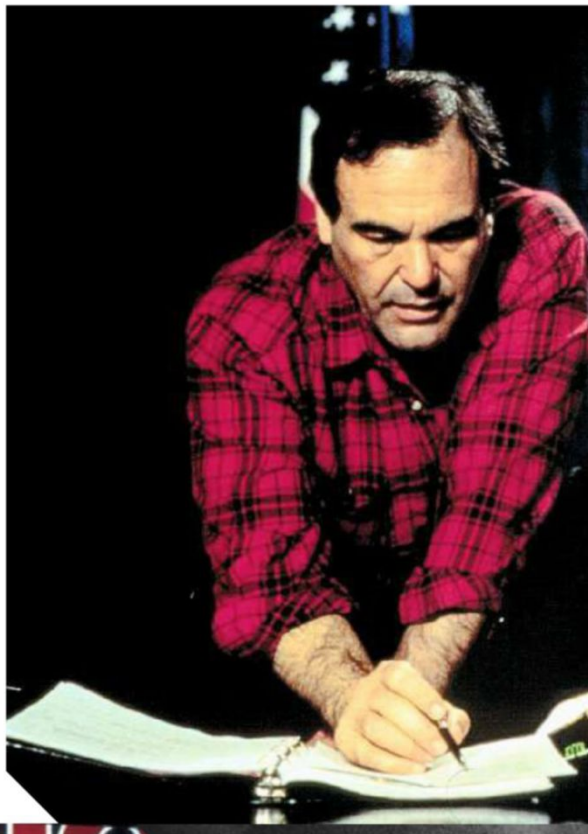
WORDS **OWEN WILLIAMS**
PORTRAIT **MARK MANN**





AUGUST

IT OFTEN FEELS, FOUR DECADES INTO HIS HOLLYWOOD CAREER, THAT **OLIVER STONE** WAS BORN CONTROVERSIAL.



The director of *Platoon*, *JFK* and now the forthcoming *Snowden* is a startling series of contradictions: a philosopher willing to throw himself into physical conflict; a loyal friend who pushes his cast to breaking point; a commercially successful filmmaker who ignores studio rules. We talked to his friends and collaborators — *Wall Street* and *W* screenwriter Stanley Weiser, *Platoon* star John C McGinley, *Talk Radio* playwright/star Eric Bogosian, *W* star Josh Brolin and *Salvador* star Tony Plana — to try to unravel the puzzle...



Above: *Nixon*, 1995: Stone runs through the script with lead Anthony Hopkins. **Left:** Eric Bogosian and Leslie Hope in 1998's *Talk Radio*. **Here:** Taking a trip down memory lane while on the set of *Platoon*, 1986.

THE SOLDIER

Oliver Stone went to Vietnam to die. The 21-year-old, boarding school-educated stockbroker's son was, in his own words, a "complicated" youth who'd already written an unpublished, 1,400-page autobiographical novel and dropped out of Yale to teach English in Saigon. Directionless, he fixed on war as "the most difficult thing a young man could go through". He joined the US military and specifically requested combat duty, in April 1967, and was in the thick of it by September, not expecting to return. His 18-month tour saw him decorated for "extraordinary acts of courage under fire" and would inform his work and politics for the rest of his life.

Post-Vietnam, Stone enrolled on NYU's film course, where he met Stanley Weiser, who would go on to write *Wall Street* with him and later *W*. "He was certainly brilliant," Weiser tells us. "He was an *enfant terrible*; provocateur; brooding loner; visionary. He was older than the rest of us, and embittered because he'd been to Vietnam, whereas all the rest of us had the privilege of not going to war. He was certainly scarred by Vietnam and he didn't talk about it. He was very private. To this day I really don't know much about his wartime experiences."

Those experiences would, however, feed directly into Stone's Vietnam trilogy: *Platoon*, presenting a grunt's eye view of the ground war; *Born On The Fourth Of July*, detailing the combat and post-war experiences of disabled veteran Ron Kovic; and *Heaven & Earth*, which attempted to present the war and its aftermath from a female, Vietnamese perspective. Tantalising glimpses of Stone's personal experiences can be inferred from all three, and from the film commentaries he recorded, where he talks about his younger self with incredulity, as if he's describing somebody else.

"I became aware of my character in *Platoon*, Sergeant O'Neill, being an amalgamation of a couple of people Oliver had known in Vietnam," recalls John C McGinley. "I thought of O'Neill like those pilot fish that suck off the kills of sharks, feeding off any character that can further him." McGinley created a backstory

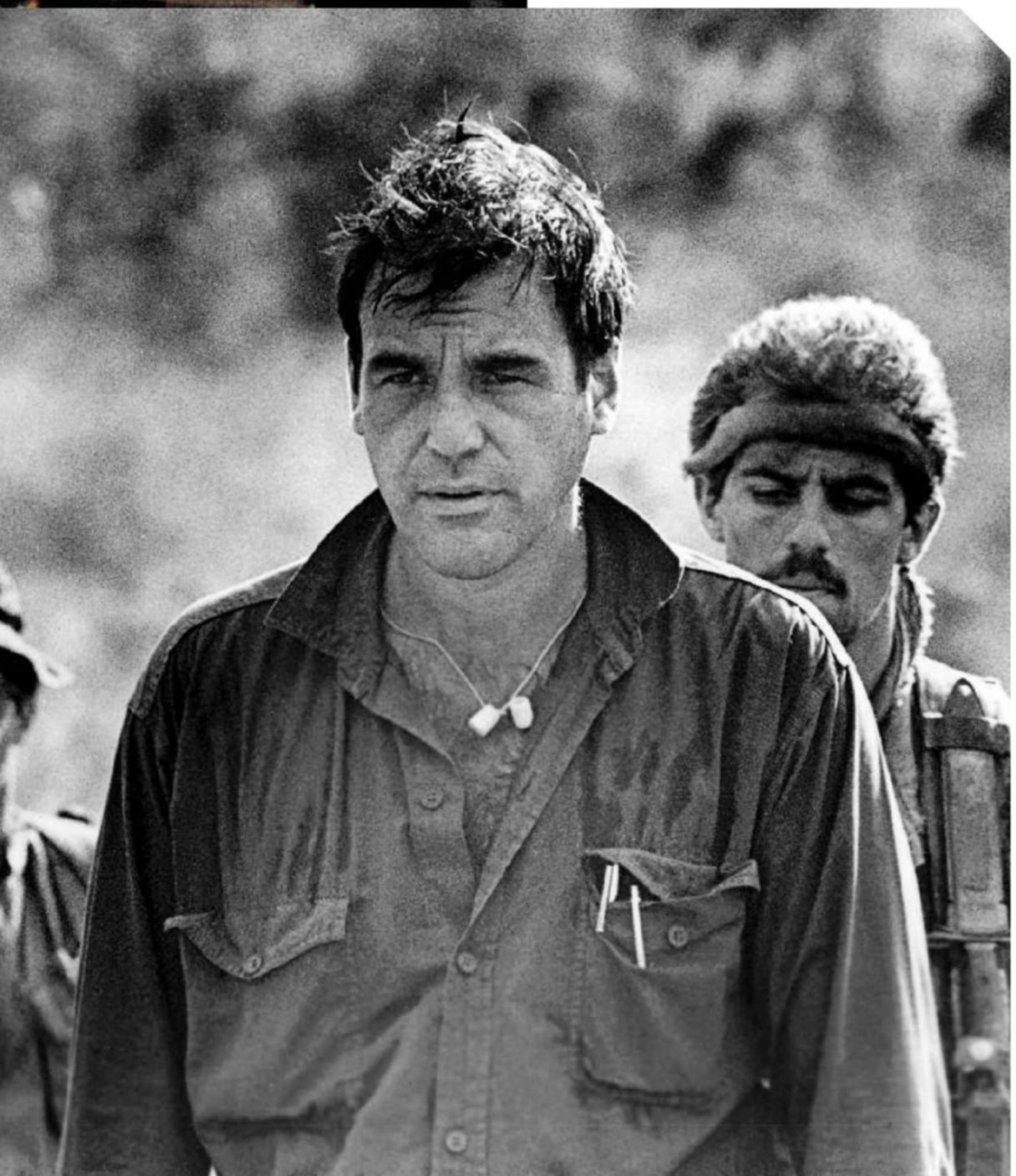




for him, one that saw him in Southeast Asia, because "he was a REMF — Rear-Echelon Mother-Fucker" (an officer who stays behind the lines far from danger) who had been transferred by his superior after cheating at a card game. "Oliver loved that," he remembers. "For the two weeks before the shoot, when he put us through the boot camp, this stuff was all we talked about."

THE JOKER

Stone's indelible, life-changing experience in Vietnam led to deadly serious drama, but he also isn't averse to finding humour in it. *Talk Radio*'s co-writer and star Eric Bogosian remembers the director prepping *Born On The Fourth Of July* at the same time that *Talk Radio* was shooting (the driven younger Stone made seven films in seven years, from *Salvador* to *JFK*). "The day we did the scene at the baseball stadium he was running make-up tests on Tom Cruise," Bogosian recounts to *Empire*.



"They wheeled Tom Cruise into my dressing room in a wheelchair and told me he was a Vietnam vet that wanted to meet me. I go, 'Hi, how are you doing?' and then everyone starts laughing and Cruise stands up and it's oh-so hilarious..."

Josh Brolin confirms: "He can be very tortured and deadly serious, but then he can turn around and be this giddy kid. I love seeing him giggle. There's nothing better."

THE INVESTIGATOR

JFK, *Nixon* and *The Doors* all play out in much the same era, while *Salvador* deals with the Salvadoran death squads and Civil War of 1979 and 1980. More recently he's made documentaries about Fidel Castro and the successive left-wing governments of Latin America. He goes so far as to make a distinction between "films" and "movies": the former serious and the latter comparatively frivolous. *U-Turn* and *Savages* both carry the credit "A movie by Oliver Stone".

Tony Plana, who played *Salvador*'s death squad leader Major Maximiliano Casanova (based on the real-life Roberto D'Aubuisson), remembers being immediately impressed by Stone's "underlying push for the truth". "I did a lot of research for *Salvador* on my own," he tells *Empire*, "but Oliver inspired that in me. While it was obviously going to be subjective, he also wanted *Salvador* to feel real and tangible, which imbues you with a great responsibility. You couldn't help but be sucked into this vortex of passion, driven by historical forces and Oliver's compelling need to expose the truth of a historical reality and bring it to life."

Lately Stone's narrative features have delved into contemporary events (the ancient history of *Alexander* remains an anomaly). *World Trade Center* was released just five years on from 9/11, while his biographical satire *W* dealt with the George W Bush Presidency before its dying days had even played out. His film about Edward Snowden, with Joseph Gordon-Levitt as the NSA whistleblower, is imminent.

The time frames may be more modern, but an interrogation of American history forms much of Stone's directional will. "My major impression of him was insatiable curiosity about why people do what they do," says Josh Brolin (*W*'s Dubya). "He's constantly trying to get deeper into the human condition, this unmasterable thing. Yes he's intense, yes he's left wing, yes he's a conspiracy theorist. But it's less that he's on this great moral high horse and more that he's just constantly questioning. There isn't an answer, necessarily. It's more of a constant search."

Weiser says that, even after four decades, he remains amazed at the lengths Stone will go to immerse himself in a subject. "It's ›

journalism in a sense," he says. "When you work with him he makes you duck into every corner of your subject. When Stone was writing *Scarface* [a screenplay-only gig, directed by Brian De Palma] he mingled among the mobsters in Cuba. For a time we were working on a movie about the Civil Rights Movement, and he told me I should go down and live in Mississippi for a while and just hang around and meet killers and live in a motel and travel around. He just expects people to do outlandish things like he does himself."

THE GENERAL

Stone's commitment to his vision extends well beyond the writing and is evident in his refusal to compromise. The NFL distanced itself from the American Football epic *Any Given Sunday* when Stone rejected their suggested changes to his portrayal of drug use within the sport. When it proved impossible to fund *W* in the US, its budget had to be scraped together from China and Europe. "Oliver's never like, 'Oh, we have to take this one 'fuck' out for the PG-13, or we have to cast this hot chick to get the young audience,'" says Brolin. "I mean, he'll do that for himself, but he won't do it for the audience or the studio."

Unsurprisingly, Stone expects the same level of integrity and commitment from his actors. "*Platoon* was deeply personal to Oliver," says McGinley. "It's almost impossible to get films made anyway, so for him to have gotten *Platoon* going when he did, when nobody would do Vietnam movies, was extraordinary. For him *not* to have ridden it pretty rough would have been tantamount to insanity. He had to get this thing done, and he had to marshal all these men in a single direction and still realise his vision, which he did." Charlie Sheen's character at one point refers to Sergeant Barnes (Tom Berenger) as Captain Ahab, and it's tempting to draw a parallel. McGinley won't quite take it that far. "I didn't see Oliver as Ahab, so much as just a really driven storyteller and a visualist par excellence. The really brutal cocktail was Oliver and Dale [Dye, 'Nam vet and technical advisor] served in the same drink. That's volatile stuff!"

Plana and McGinley both describe incredibly difficult productions: *Platoon* shot in the Philippines with the constant threat of a coup against President Cory Aquino and the attendant anarchy in the background. Plana similarly describes *Salvador* as a chaotic process where the day-to-day experience "reflected the reality that we were trying to capture". James Woods, starring in the film as journalist Richard Boyle, was understandably reluctant to travel to the set following the murder by guerilla fighters of Stone's military advisor, Ricardo Cienfuegos. Stone called Woods a pussy (but the shoot was moved from El Salvador to the safer Mexico).

"Those are both very strong egos and they were always challenging one another; it was fascinating to watch," Plana says of the Stone-Woods relationship. "Jim Belushi [playing photographer Doctor Rock, the Doctor Gonzo to Woods' Hunter S Thompson] was in the middle of it all, like the Fool in *King Lear*, making fun of it all with this wonderful, mordant sense of humour."

Bogosian had a comparatively easy ride in the safety of *Talk Radio*'s studio setting, but still describes Stone in military terms as "the general" of his troops. "He had a very intense focus, and he didn't always know how he was going to get where he wanted to go, but he knew when he wasn't there yet. He would keep trying to figure out how to play the scene, how to make it look right, the rhythmic thing. Whatever the problem was, he would keep chewing at it."

THE TASKMASTER

Achieving Stone's standards can be a punishing process for anyone in his immediate orbit. "You can't get comfortable," laughs Weiser. "If he's just praised you, you know a beating is coming. But it works the other way around, too: he's good cop and bad cop at the same time. He forces you, he provokes you, he insults you, he goads you, and he knows your maximum area of vulnerability. He hones in on that and it's really bedevilling."

On the set of *Wall Street* Stone flatly told Michael Douglas that he'd been watching the rushes and Douglas looked like he'd never acted a day in his life. Bogosian tells a similar story about being informed that the *Talk Radio* dailies were terrible and that the film was going to fail catastrophically unless Bogosian raised his game.

"He said to one guy, 'You were so good in the audition. What happened?'" Bogosian continues. "He said to someone else, 'You're wallpaper. Every time you come into a scene you disappear.' Of course, people would be crushed. I asked him years later if it was a psychological thing he was doing. He said, 'No, I meant it.'"

However, it's difficult to entirely trust that assertion. "He came up to me during *W.*," recalls Brolin with a grin, "and he goes — you know, with that squint he has — 'Hey man, do you have something medical going on with you? What's up? Are you feeling okay today?' And I immediately said, 'Don't do that. I know what you're doing right now, and I don't like it.' And he smiles and he goes, 'Aw man, you're fucking tough!' And he never did it again. [*Laughs*] It was that thing of trying to keep people off camber in order to keep them raw."

Plana recalls a similar tactic on *Salvador*: "He called me a pussy a couple of times. He

















From top to bottom: Going over the script with Josh Brolin, as George Bush Jr, on the set of *W* (2008); Giving direction to Kevin Costner on the much-acclaimed *JFK* (1991); Happy behind the camera while filming *Wall Street* (1987) with Michael Douglas; 2016's *Snowden*: Joseph Gordon-Levitt as infamous NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

was trying to get my goat to make me angrier, saying stupid shit to get a reaction and intensify my emotional reality. You tend to channel that reaction back into what you're doing."

Plana turned down a role in *Platoon* to make *¡Three Amigos!* instead, choosing a five-star hotel in Tucson, Arizona over what he knew would be a gruelling few months amid ticks and poisonous centipedes in the Philippine jungle. Stone didn't speak to him for years, until he needed a reliable Cuban actor for *JFK*'s Carlos Bringuier (Plana would subsequently also appear in *Nixon* as Manolo Sanchez). Even then he made Plana audition, and wasn't in the room when he did so, leaving it to his casting director. "But I was glad to get back in his good graces eventually," Plana smiles.

This is typical of the way collaborators explain Stone's behaviour, one of many who are confident that his methods not only provoke but inspire their best work. Insists Weiser: "Ultimately he's like a really good tennis partner. He forces you to play up to his level, to do a better job than you'd do for a lesser director."

THE ONE-OFF

Whatever they suffered during shooting, Stone is held in real respect and affection by his collaborators. Bogosian says drily that he and Stone didn't stay in touch after *Talk Radio*, and were never really what he'd call friends. "But we created something together I'm very proud of. That sort of bond with another person is indelible. Oliver put a stamp of approval on me early in my career, with all the weight of his tremendous notoriety and power. He set me up so that people looked at me differently, so I'm forever beholden to him for that."

Brolin reaches for his phone to pull up a text message he says is "classic Oliver". The director had popped into the actor's mind recently, and Brolin wrote to him: "Just been hit with a hammer of your visage and I miss you greatly. Hope we have a chance to catch up soon. Much love." Stone's response: "Why 'hammer' and 'hit' verbiage? You always typecast me in warlike terms."

"That's him," Brolin laughs. "You can't fucking say anything. But I love that. I appreciate the language, first of all. And that he saw an opportunity not to be linear. Some people do it and it's a major affectation: you can feel how hard they're working at it. For him, it's what comes first. He actually has to work at going, 'Oh, wait, perhaps I'll just answer: Nice to hear from you, I've been thinking about you too.' That's not his default. His default is skewed."

SNOWDEN IS IN CINEMAS LATER THIS YEAR AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE

WRITTEN IN STONE?

How much do Stone's screenwriting-only jobs reflect his preoccupations?



SCARFACE (1983)

Directed by: Brian De Palma
Loose remake of the 1932 Howard Hawks gangster film.
Stone scale: ★★★★☆
Marks for international drug crime, US/South American relations, legal and political skullduggery, ethnic stereotypes.

MIDNIGHT EXPRESS (1978)

Directed by: Alan Parker
Adaptation of Billy Hayes and William Hoffer's book exposing life in a Turkish jail.
Stone Scale: ★★★★☆
Marks for international drug crime, US international relations, legal and political skullduggery and ethnic stereotypes.

YEAR OF THE DRAGON (1985)

Directed by: Michael Cimino
Adaptation of Robert Daley's novel about organised crime in New York.
Stone Scale: ★★★☆☆
Marks for international drug crime, 'Nam-vet protagonist and ethnic stereotypes.

EVITA (1996)

Directed by: Alan Parker
Adaptation of Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical about Argentinian first lady Eva Peron.
Stone Scale: ★★★☆☆
Marks for South American politics, revolution and chaos of war, but some deducted for singing, Madonna and Jimmy Nail.

CONAN THE BARBARIAN (1982)

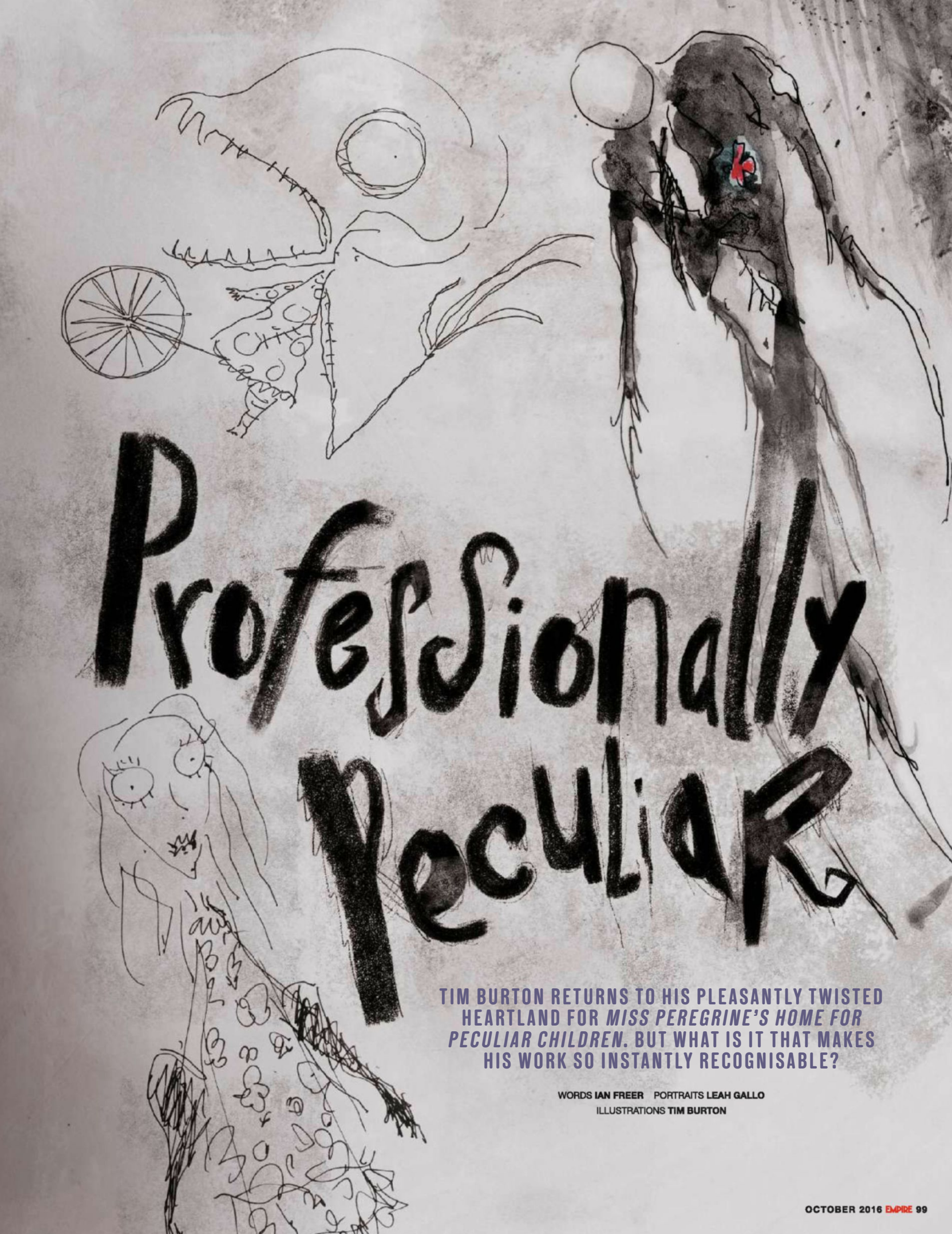
Directed by: John Milius
Very loose adaptation of Robert E Howard's fantasy stories.
Stone Scale: ★★☆☆☆
Marks for totalitarian regime, Nietzschean quest for knowledge, revolution and bad wigs, but deducted for wizard that turns into giant snake, and Arnie eating a vulture while crucified.

EIGHT MILLION WAYS TO DIE (1986)

Directed by: Hal Ashby
Adaptation of Lawrence Block's detective novels about private investigator Matthew Scudder.
Stone Scale: ★☆☆☆☆
One mark. About drug crime, but it's a generic noir.



Tim Burton, photographed exclusively for *Empire* in London, on 4 July, 2016.



Professionally Peculiar

TIM BURTON RETURNS TO HIS PLEASANTLY TWISTED HEARTLAND FOR *MISS PEREGRINE'S HOME FOR PECULIAR CHILDREN*. BUT WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES HIS WORK SO INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE?

WORDS **IAN FREER** PORTRAITS **LEAH GALLO**
ILLUSTRATIONS **TIM BURTON**

TIM BURTON

is shuddering on the sofa of a posh London hotel. The patron saint of oddballs, the sultan of spook and spinner of shadowy phantasms is recoiling from a single word: Burtonesque.

"When you just said that to me, my skin crawled," he says, dressed in his usual Cure-circa-1985 uniform. "It actually makes me sad. I've spent my whole life trying to become a human being. I struggle with that anyway."

Over the past 31 years, Burton's 18 films have articulated and dramatised that struggle not in heavy or artsy drama but in black comedies, kid flicks and big-budget blockbusters. Few filmmakers have delivered such a consistent body of work, filled with so many recurring themes, motifs and collaborations. To underline the point, the trailer for his latest, *Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children*, bears the legend "FROM VISIONARY DIRECTOR TIM BURTON". Don't get him started on that either.

"I wish they would fucking take that shit out," he says. "I will take it as a compliment but it goes back to my early days of not liking categorisation. I have trouble figuring myself out, and everybody else has me figured out. So I find that a little disturbing."

As much as he rails against it, Burton has become a brand, his name a byword for a pop-gothic sensibility fuelled by a love of outsiders at odds with the world, and tales told with spellbinding visual panache. It gets its fullest expression in fables like *Edward Scissorhands*, *Beetlejuice* and *Sleepy Hollow*, but Burton can transmute it across any number of genres. From superhero films (*Batman*) to biopics (*Ed Wood, Big Eyes*), from science-fiction (*Mars Attacks!, Planet Of The Apes*) to musicals (*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber Of Fleet Street*), he can imbue any genre with his own neuroses, obsessions and wonky worldview.

"I'm really a lousy communicator so I have to feel something otherwise I can't really do it," he explains. In *Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children*, he found things to feel in spades.



The misfits: introducing Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children.

MISS PEREGRINE IS so peak Burton it's a surprise to learn that the project didn't start with him. In fact, it's the brainchild of novelist Ransom Riggs, a USC film student, former blogger for Mental Floss and bona fide Burton fan. Riggs originally wanted to publish a book of vintage photographs, mostly of children, drawn from private collectors. But he was encouraged by his editor at Quirk Books to build a novel around the strange and beautiful images which form the spine of the story. Riggs took visual cues from the pictures to invent his peculiar children. A figure wearing heavy boots was explained as a way in which to anchor a girl prone to floating off because she is lighter than air, for example. He eventually fashioned a story about 16-year-old Jacob Portman (played by Asa Butterfield in Burton's film) who, after the murder of his grandfather, follows clues in his old photographs to a derelict Welsh orphanage run by the eccentric Alma LeFay Peregrine (Eva Green), who has the ability to turn back time and also can transform into a peregrine. Given the book by his agent, Burton found common ground with Riggs before he even got to the plot.

"I also collect old photographs," says Burton. "There's something about looking at a photograph where it tells you something but it doesn't tell you something. There's a poetry to it, a mystery, an emotion. That he concocted the story that way was really beautiful and interesting."

Burton's interest was equally piqued by the story's use of a time loop that, *Groundhog Day*-style, means the characters repeatedly re-live the same day in 1940, just before the orphanage is hit by the Luftwaffe. The bomb drop, rewound by Miss Peregrine with a big old pocket watch, is a moment of typical Burton invention, delivered with a delicious twinkle by Eva Green. But he couldn't care less about



Eva Green's Alma LeFay Peregrine: not averse to blue.





Tim Burton sets himself a target on set.

inventing a scientific explanation for the device.

"I wasn't into the mechanics of time travel," he says. "There were certain episodes of *The Twilight Zone* that had time-travel elements but they weren't driven by it. It was more part of the emotional fabric. About the feeling of displacement, being trapped or not fitting in."

Despite the personal threads spinning through his work, Burton has never written his own screenplays, choosing kindred spirits to put his stamp onto script pages. This time he opted for Jane Goldman, who revealed a shared affinity for outcasts in *Stardust*, *Kick-Ass* and *X-Men: First Class*, and with whom he felt "a psychic connection" through her work. "She gets peculiar people," he says simply. "She probably is one."

If so, Goldman must have loved the opium pipe-smoking headmistress Alma LeFay Peregrine. Green had already played a weirdo headmistress in *Cracks*, but came to Burton's attention in *Casino Royale*. He cast her as vengeful witch Angelique Bouchard in *Dark Shadows* and the pair just clicked.

"The thing I love about her is that I feel I have this intense connection but she is very private, very mysterious," says Burton. "That's what I wish the movie industry had more of. We don't know every single fucking thing about her. She is treading the tightrope between weirdness, emotion, power and mysteriousness. You can do all the special effects you want but you have to find somebody who you believe can turn into a bird. She's really got that quality."

Sharing *Edward Scissorhands*' love of fantastical topiary, Miss Peregrine presides over a motley gang of misfit kids who, because of the time loop, look young but are actually much older. They all boast spectacularly Victorian names and have special powers (or physical quirks): Bronwyn Bruntley (incredible strength); Claire Densmore (a mouth at the back of her head); Olive Abroholos Elephanta (makes fire with her hands); Emma Bloom (controls air); Horace Somnusson (prophetic dreams); Hugh Apiston (controls bees); Enoch O'Connor (resurrects the dead); Fiona Frauenfeld (manipulates plants; it's better than that sounds) and Millard Nullings (invisibility).

The school, and film, have a sense of compassion for those who don't belong, and that's where Miss Peregrine touches base with the heart of Burton's work. But there is another way to read all this. Isn't Miss Peregrine's home for peculiar children just a 1940s incarnation of Xavier's School For Gifted Youngsters?

"It's not 'X-Men Jr'!" says Burton emphatically. "There are these weird kids: do they have powers or are they afflictions? For me, it just tapped into a feeling I had as a child — and unfortunately, as an adult — which is that I don't quite fit into a category. These kids aren't ripping off their shirts and shouting, 'I AM BEE BOY!' or, 'I AM AIR GIRL!' They're just kids. It was like looking at that world from a side angle."

To find the source of this askew view, you have to look far from the confines of a Welsh orphanage, both geographically and spiritually, to the sunny suburbs of Burbank, California.

WHEN TIMOTHY WALTER Burton was the same age as his Peculiar kids (12, not pushing 100) he made 8mm movies. He began with his take on H. G. Wells' *The Island Of Dr Moreau*, titled *The Island Of Doctor Agor*, in which he played the lead.

"We snuck into the old LA Zoo," he laughs, falling back onto the sofa. "Just a bunch of kids, we had no permits, no nothing. We got chased away by the police a couple of times. [But] we just put on some funny costumes and shot a movie. We're basically doing the same thing now but only a bit more expensively, unfortunately."

It quickly became clear that his special power or affliction was never acting. ›





Dynamic duo: Telepathic twins 1 and 2 (Thomas and Joseph Odwell).

"I was terrible," he laughs. "I did a little Mexican horror film and I wasn't too bad in that. [But] I try to stay behind the camera as much as possible. I learned that fairly early on."

It's perhaps not a surprise that Burton tried to make sense of the world through a camera lens. Although his friends and a rarely mentioned brother (Daniel, also an artist) are often omitted from his narrative to exaggerate his outsider status, there's no question that his relationship with his parents — Bill, a former Minor League Baseball player and Jean, the owner of a cat-themed emporium — was strained. The oft-repeated story from his childhood saw them brick up the window in his bedroom, leaving him with only a chink of light to illuminate the room. Aged 12, he chose to leave and live with his grandmother, who provided him with a "sanctuary". By 16 a drive for independence led him to move into a small flat above her garage, paying rent by working in a restaurant. Unsurprising, then, that Miss Peregrine is the latest in a long line of his films where natural parents don't figure.

"You feel like you're crazy," says Burton about growing up. "Like you don't belong anywhere. You're an emotional person but you have trouble showing it. That's something I felt."

Before movies, he found different ways to express his twisted creativity. He convinced the kid next door that an alien invasion was underway (ack-ack-ack) and, like Sid from *Toy Story*, used to gleefully yank the heads off toy soldiers. The young Burton found solace in drawing and reading (Dr Seuss, Roald Dahl, Edgar Allen Poe) as well as movies on TV with titles like *The Brain That Wouldn't Die*. Burton's adult career is littered with call-backs and references to his youth, forming an obtuse kind of autobiography. For instance, the ending of *Miss Peregrine*, which differs from the book, was shot on Blackpool pier because it reminded him of the pier in Santa Monica. "I used to go there as a lonely teenager to look at the crashing waves. Blackpool had that same vibe. I've always liked old amusement parks; they have a haunted quality." Running amok on the pier are an army of skeletons, another touchstone from Burton's youth. *Jason And The Argonauts* was the first film he remembers seeing on the big screen at the Avalon Theatre in Catalina.

In further homage to Ray Harryhausen, he has included a scene of "pure" stop motion — "We did a little toy fight" — and has intentionally tried to imbue the CGI with a "stop motion feel. It's an ethereal thing you can't put your finger on". Burton's aesthetic has always steered towards the handcrafted — consider *The Nightmare Before Christmas* or *Frankenweenie* — but the contours of his career have followed the rise of CGI. For all his love of old-fashioned tactile artistry, it's a discipline he has never resisted.

"You can do anything," he marvels. "That's why I have a problem with a lot of these superhero things. I can't remember which one is which because the effects are all the same. The good news is that it has gotten to such a good degree it should now just be part of the fabric of what you are doing. That's what [effects] *should* be, anyway."

Burton's references to the forms and films of his childhood, even with a modern twist, speak to a stick that is often used by critics to beat him: that his films are hopped up on the junk of his youth, and are basically the same film over and over without ever stretching his technical talents to say something about the real world. It has led to a caricatured view of him and his work as mining an endless seam of dark kook. What this doesn't take into account is a) his films mean something to him and b) there is an impish, playful, comedic quality at work, both on film and in person.

"I get so sick of being The Dark Lord when I never have been," he says. "It's still, to this day, mind-boggling to me. It's actually offensive."

While his work might be distilled into the kind of recognisable brand that he despises — and *Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children* is on message — it shares a quality with his lead characters: they don't conform to categorisation.

"I remember *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* was deemed one of the ten worst movies of that year," he recalls. "Then I did *Beetlejuice* and they said, 'It was nothing like the last one, that one was great.' 'Wait a minute, you said it was a fucking piece of shit. Now it's great? Well, go fuck yourself.'"

It could have been worse. They could have called it Burtonesque.

***MISS PEREGRINE'S HOME FOR PECULIAR CHILDREN* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 30 SEPTEMBER AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE**

The Eva Green Weirdometer

THE REAL MISS PEREGRINE'S FILM ROLES, FROM SPOOKY TO STANDARD...

WEIRD



MISS PEREGRINE
Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children
Winds back time, turns into a falcon, likes to smoke opium.



ANGELIQUE BOUCHARD
Dark Shadows
A witch who casts spells, holds sex romps up walls and whose face cracks like glass.



SERAFINA PEKKALA
The Golden Compass
A flying witch. A snow goose is her spirit animal. Can control the wind.



ARTEMISIA
300: Rise Of An Empire
Beheads victims, kisses severed heads and dresses like Catwoman.



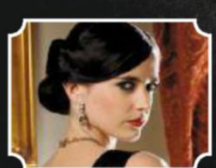
EMILIA/SALLY
Franklyn
Films suicide attempts for use in an art installation. Has red hands.



ISABELLE
The Dreamers
Has sex with her brother, has a distant relationship with clothes.



SIBYLLA
Kingdom Of Heaven
Just your bog-standard murder-plotting Jerusalem Queen. Has a thing for blacksmiths.



VESPER LYND
Casino Royale
Tendency to shower fully dressed, double crosser. Has a thing for secret agents.

NORMAL

THE EMPIRE INTERVIEW

IN FROM THE WILD

SAM NEILL WAS STALKED BY DINOSAURS IN *JURASSIC PARK*, THE US NAVY IN *THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER* AND NOW, IN *HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE*, BY SOCIAL SERVICES. WE CAUGHT UP WITH CINEMAS'S BEST-LOVED PREY

WORDS **JAMES JENNINGS** PORTRAITS **DAMIAN BENNETT**





Sam Neill, photographed exclusively for *Empire* in Sydney, Australia, on 28 July, 2016.

FOR A MAN

who played the lead in Steven Spielberg's biggest film to date — the first one with the velociraptors — Sam Neill is a humble gent, never far from a self-deprecating quip. "One or two people smile at me now when I go through an airport, rather than muttering, 'Wanker,' as I pass, which is a change," he says wryly. The laconic 68-year-old has enjoyed a recent spike in popularity in his homeland after playing a curmudgeon with a heart of gold in Taika Waititi's *Hunt For The Wilderpeople*, which became New Zealand's biggest-ever homegrown hit. The tiny, independent film — hardly anyone knew Waititi was making it until a trailer surfaced to accompany its Sundance premiere — is now hoping for similar success globally.

Wilderpeople follows an unlikely pair of outsiders — Neill's gruff mountain man Uncle Hec and juvenile delinquent Ricky Baker (Julian Dennison) — who go on the lam in the New Zealand bush, pursued by the authorities in an unlikely manhunt. Being an outsider is something Neill knows well: his career has leapfrogged from New Zealand (1977's *Sleeping Dogs*) to Australia (1979's *My Brilliant Career*) to Hollywood and the UK. Before that, Neill was a half-British kid born in Northern Ireland and transplanted back to NZ aged seven. It's a move he credits with kick-starting his career. "Although my father was a New Zealander, no-one gives a flying fuck about that in a playground in 1950s New Zealand," he recounts dryly. "I've always thought that's what started me acting in a way, just as a means of survival. I was in effect acting, getting rid of my accent, assuming another accent altogether, just pretending to be someone else."

Happily, "pretending to be someone else" has led to diverse, high-profile roles in such films as *Jurassic Park*, *The Piano*, *Dead Calm*, *The Hunt For Red October* and lauded television programmes including *The Tudors* and *Peaky Blinders*. If you sometimes get the impression that the charming, reserved Neill would be just as happy producing Pinot Noir anonymously at his Two Paddocks vineyard as he is standing in front of a camera lens, he still proved willing to sit down with *Empire* and discuss his career highs, lows and *Event Horizon*...



***Hunt For The Wilderpeople* is such an endearing, offbeat film. How was it pitched to you?**
I got this email from the producers that said, "Have a read, see if you're interested." I knew I'd be interested because I know everything Taika's done — although after reading the script I wasn't entirely convinced anyone would get it from overseas, because it's so acutely of our place [New Zealand]. But everyone seems to love it.

Is what you read pretty much what wound up on screen?
Quite a bit changed; Taika thinks on his feet. For instance, the "Ricky Baker" [birthday] song we had to do on the spot, because we couldn't do *Happy Birthday* for copyright reasons.

It's a hilarious scene, but you keep quite a poker face.
I never had any trouble with that. Taika says I've got a deep well of grumpiness I can draw upon, that sustains me. [But] Taika's sermon in the film [the director cameos as a clergyman], that was problematic, to keep a straight face in that.

How was the rest of the shoot?
It was a lot of laughter. I was a little apprehensive when I met Julian Dennison, because if I didn't like the kid, that'd be a challenge. But I liked him immediately; he's very funny. We shot it in about four weeks. We were going like the clappers, but I like the energy you get from that. Too much waiting can really get you down on a long shoot, which is mostly sitting around bullshitting to other actors, whinging about lunch. We just had to get on with it, get it in the can and fuck off.

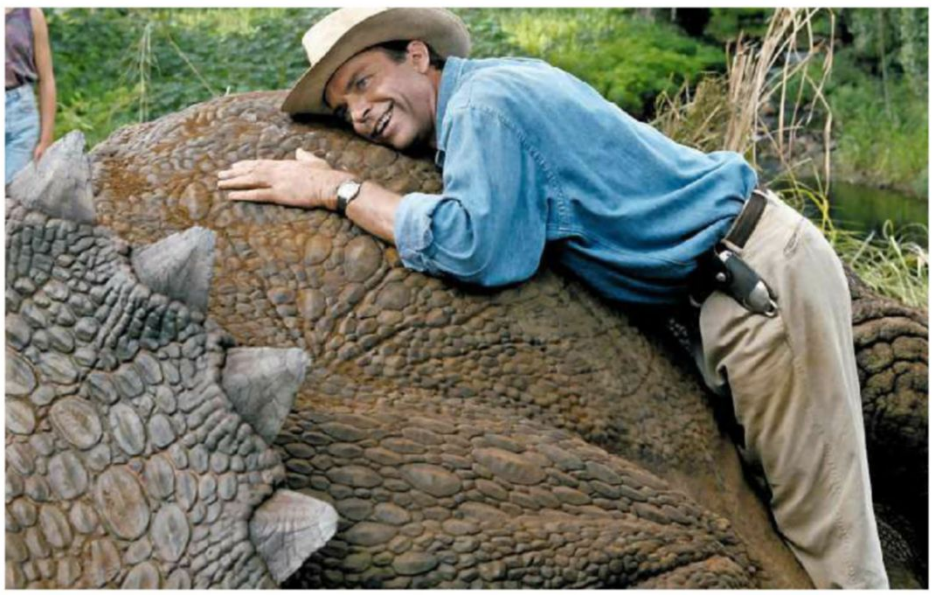
You toured New Zealand doing provincial Q&A screenings. It's rare that actors are so willing to champion a film like that...
It's one of those rare films in your career where you think, "I really want this to do well." We took the film to Nelson and one of my oldest friends, John — who I'd been friends with since I was 13 — came along with his family. They loved the film, and then John went home — he was in remission from cancer — and that was his last time out of the house. He died about five weeks after that. I don't think the film killed him, but I was very happy that I got to show it to them before he died. It's like, at school, you do the woodwork project, you make the coffee table, you take it home [and] show it to the people you love. This was my coffee table project.

Halfway through its run it was said one in nine New Zealanders had seen the movie...
Which begs the question: what's wrong with the other eight? I noticed that we've dropped from 100 per cent on Rotten Tomatoes to 99 per cent. Of course it's the only review you ever remember, too.

Did you learn bushcraft skills while filming?
Taika seems to think I'm some kind of Pinot Noir-swilling lounge lizard, but in fact growing up in New Zealand I spent a lot of time in the bush, and still do; I go fishing every year. I'm okay out there. And a beard is nice because you can keep a secret food supply in it that can keep you going for at least another two days before they come to find you.

Previous page: Sam wears P Johnson Tailor button-down shirt. Suit jacket and trouser, crochet tie and pocket scarf www.pjt.com







Left: Neill as Uncle Hec with fellow adventurer Ricky (Julian Dennison) in *Hunt For The Wilderpeople*. **Below:** Cuddling up to a dino in 1993's monster hit *Jurassic Park*. **Bottom:** A little tense in *Dead Calm* (1989).

Taiki had a beard in the film, too. Were you guys having a competition?
I have to say my beard was the most vigorous on set, but there were a lot around. Having been to the *Thor: Ragnarok* set [Waititi is directing], I can tell you Taika is bearding again. It's a pretty beardy film. I was up on the set last week [and] I'll be doing a little cameo next month, just for fun. My part is small, more a case of, "Did you spot [Sam Neill] among the beards?"

Has Taika instructed you to go to the gym to get your biceps up to Chris Hemsworth levels?
I'm already there. I've got muscles on my muscles, I'm ready to go. Hemsworth can go surfing for a day and I'll be his stunt double.

Did you see *Jurassic World*? What did you think of it?
I thought it was done very, very well, and the actors were excellent. There was some re-treading of gags, like putting the kids in a bubble car and beating the shit out of the car. One can hardly argue with success though. It was fucking massive.

People still love seeing humans being eaten by dinosaurs.
Yeah, and if you're a character in one of those things, you better not be smoking, or on your mobile phone. No weaknesses or you're meat. Living meat, as opposed to dead meat.

What was it like being directed by Spielberg?
Steven's all over everything. My guess would be that for 90 per cent of [*Jurassic Park*] he was the camera operator. So he's got one eye down the tube, and one eye on you. There's absolutely nothing he's not involved in. It's sort of staggering how much energy he has, because he started shooting *Schindler's List* about two weeks after we wrapped.

Speaking of legends, you worked opposite Meryl Streep twice, on *Plenty* and *A Cry In The Dark*. How was that?
By the time we did the second I was very comfortable with her. She scared the shit out of me in the first one. I was too young, and too bedazzled by her. I was daunted. And I think on day one we had a sex scene. I wonder how many actors have done sex scenes with Meryl Streep. Probably just a handful.

There's a career achievement to chalk up.
I went to see her give a charity talk a few years ago. There were questions from the audience. Some were quite profound, but there's always a dumb question, and the dumb question was, "Who was the best kisser you ever worked with?" She answered straight away, "Sam Neill."
I thought that was the greatest endorsement, but she'd seen me in the audience.

You should leave out that part of the story.
No, I couldn't possibly. You can't tell these things without at least a smidgeon of self-deprecation. ›





Top: *Event Horizon*'s (1997) "bloodied beast with no genitals". **Above:** As Chief Inspector Campbell in Season 1 of *Peaky Blinders* (2013).

***The Hunt For Red October* shoot seems like it would have been arduous.**
Tight, tight sets. It surprised me because whenever I've worked, particularly in Australia or New Zealand, there's always heaps of women in the cast and crew. That's the only film I've ever done where there were no women. That was strange. [But it was] a really good boys' film made for boys, by boys. [Director] John McTiernan and I liked each other a lot, Sean [Connery] and I got on very well. What interested me was how meticulous he is. Every little line, you'd walk past his trailer and hear him [*affects Connery doing a Russian accent*], "Three degrees, Mr. Borodin." He's saying that over and over, until he's got it the way he wants it.

So a tough shoot, but a good role?
A very good role. And I'll tell you what, this would never happen anymore, but the US Navy were very helpful and cooperative, and asked the cast if anyone wanted to go out on a nuclear sub for the weekend. I said, "Shit, yeah!" We went underwater for 48 hours on the USS Dallas. Unbelievable.

Sticking with water-work, what are your memories of *Dead Calm*?
It was a thoroughly engrossing film, and I loved being on the water. George Miller shot a lot of the second unit stuff. The DVD extras would be great because a lot of [cut] scenes were George directing me. There was a sub-plot when a shark invades the sinking boat and it's man versus shark. It was fantastic, but when they put it together they thought it just was a bit much. [*Laughs*] We had mechanical sharks and guys with fins on their backs. It'd be great to see, but they haven't done a DVD with extras. *Empire* should start a campaign.

Did you know your co-star Billy Zane is *Empire*'s agony uncle?
Billy Zane writes advice? Are you fucking kidding me? I love Billy, but I wouldn't take any advice he had to give on anything. That is fucking fabulous. I've ended up in some strange places with Billy, and both of us could've done with advice from somebody sensible, which wasn't to be had.

You've done a bit of TV work recently, such as *Peaky Blinders*. Do you think the quality of TV has turned a corner in recent years?
The '70s were the great days of Hollywood movies because they were doing big films, medium films, and small films. That quality middle area, between arthouse and the blockbuster, television has taken up that space, and that's where actors want to be. When *Peaky Blinders* turned up I thought, "What good fortune is this?" How often do you get to play a part of such complexity and hideousness?

Your character there was a religious man, albeit a deeply compromised one, but you played the antichrist himself in *Omen III: The Final Conflict*.
Jim Caviezel once told me he thought he was always destined to play Christ. I failed to ask him if I was preordained to play the antichrist.

[*Laughs*] I haven't seen that film since 1981. Taika, on the other hand, has seen it multiple times and knows all my lines. He'd mutter my lines in my ear, "You have won... nothing." Just to torment me as I was about to do a scene. He knows *Event Horizon* too. I couldn't tell you a line.

***Event Horizon* is a bit of a cult classic. What are your memories of that?**
Having fun with my friends Fish [Laurence Fishburne] and Sean Pertwee — still good friends. And getting horrible claustrophobia in a spacesuit once. I had to rip the thing off my head. Agonising hours in make-up to turn into a sort of bloodied beast with no genitals. I'd be in make-up at 2am, and I'd get out of there at 10pm. The only thing that got me through was VHS tapes of *Father Ted*. It's funny, though; some things survive and some are never heard from again. There's a sort of dark afterlife on YouTube.

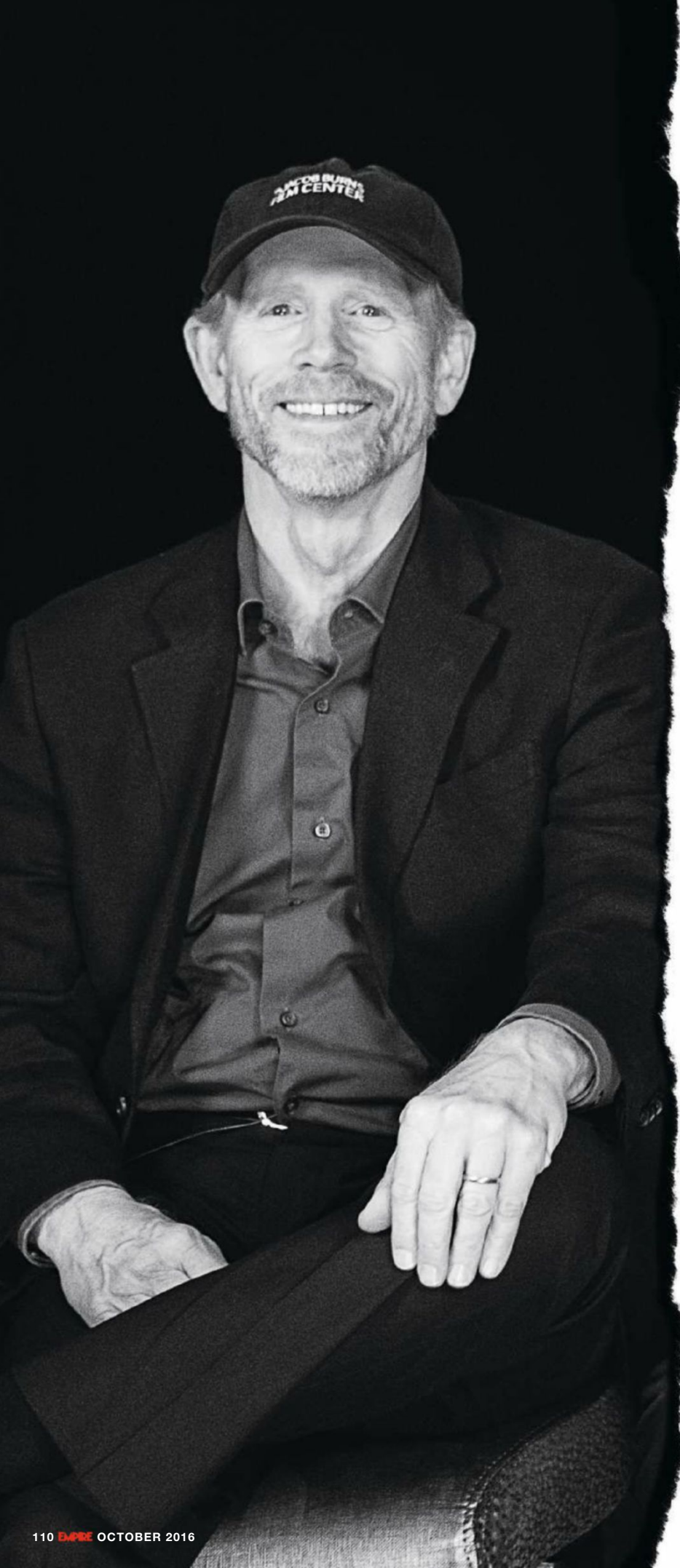
Especially in your line of work.
[*Laughs*] Yes a lingering afterlife, like uranium. That's what my roles are — used uranium, glowing in an unpleasant way underground somewhere, radioactive for another 10,000 years. But in essence, I would describe my modest career as outrageous good fortune. I've been very lucky.

HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 16 SEPTEMBER AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 47



This page: Sam wears Trenery tee www.trenery.com.au. Tommy Hilfiger navy jacket www.global.tommy.com. **Grooming:** Ziggy Golden. **Stylist:** Elana Hocking @ Reload Agency





I'M (NOT) WITH THE BAND

Ron Howard was never a Beatles maniac, but his new documentary about the band, *The Beatles: Eight Days A Week*, is the movie you'd expect a superfan to make...

WORDS **DORIAN LYNSKEY**

MJ KIM/MPL COMMUNICATIONS



Ron Howard first met The Beatles

— half of them, anyway — exactly as you'd hope Ron Howard had met The Beatles: as a young actor on the set of *Happy Days*. One day in January 1974 during the show's first year, John Lennon came to the set to introduce his son, Julian, to Fonzie and the gang. Ringo Starr doesn't recall his own, separate visit to the set but then, Howard says with a grin, "He admits there's a lot he doesn't quite remember about the '70s."

Howard wants to make clear that he was never a superfan. He was among the 73 million Americans who watched The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show* on 9 February, 1964, and he then requested a generic dime-store Beatle wig for his tenth birthday, but he didn't collect every record and he never saw them live. In fact, he cheerfully admits, he's never been a serious music buff. This makes the 62-year-old director a surprising choice to make *The Beatles: Eight Days A Week — The Touring Years*, the first officially approved Fab Four documentary since *The Beatles Anthology* in 1995. But Howard says that was part of the appeal.

"I didn't know anything about the moon or Formula One!" he says, referring to his work on *Apollo 13* and *Rush*. "[English director] John Schlesinger made *Midnight Cowboy*, this quintessential American movie. He said, 'Sometimes it takes an outsider to see something with a fresh eye and share that.' I've always taken that to heart. I was applying my movie sensibility to telling the story and sharing what I was seeing, not as an encyclopedic Beatles fan but as someone who admired them, like most people did."

In his teens, playing Opie in *The Andy Griffith Show*, Howard may not have been obsessed by their music, but he *was* enthralled by The Beatles' evolution from loveable mop-tops to fearlessly experimental grown-up artists. "I was fascinated by the transformation and the way it reflected a cultural shift," he says. "I remember in junior high I had English teachers using their lyrics to help teach poetry. It was not lost on me that, just a few years before, they were doing *I Want To Hold Your Hand*. They were absolutely brilliant writers in all kinds of genres. That's another thing that appeals to me. I like trying my hand at different tones and genres and they did, too. I really admire that because that's always a little frightening."

Eight Days A Week is an energetic account of the frenzied period between the onset of Beatlemania in the summer of 1963 and the band's last paying show, at San Francisco's Candlestick Park, just three years later. It depicts four friends growing up fast in a culture in flux. Lightning rods for a generation, they eventually decided that in order to stay together, they had to leave the road.

"I saw it almost as an ensemble adventure story," says Howard. "A survival story. I even thought about it like the movie *Das Boot*. The thing I like to do in movies is put the audience in the lead characters' point of view. I don't think most people understand how pressurised it was. It's inspiring because their creativity only grew; they were fuelled by it. That's a totally incongruous notion when you see what their lives were like."

Howard's storytelling priority was to explain to younger viewers exactly why Beatles tours were epochal events. "My number one goal was for them to come away with a more profound sense of The Beatles' place in cultural history beyond a really successful band that wrote a lot of great songs," he says. "They have no idea how extraordinary the impact on culture was."



The Fab Four before playing the Coventry Theatre, November 1963.



Happy days: Ron Howard, Ringo Starr and Paul McCartney reminisce.



ARCHIVE STILLS © APPLE CORPS LIMITED

We meet the surviving Beatles in a suite inside the hidden VIP wing of the Mirage hotel in Las Vegas, where the flesh-and-blood Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr are sitting on a couch beside Howard. Outside the hotel, a towering billboard for Cirque de Soleil's *Love*, based on The Beatles' music, shows the group in all their *Sgt. Pepper* pomp. To sit down inside, with two members of the most important band of all time — Starr, 76, looks, well, starry in black clothes and sunglasses; McCartney, 74, is softer and more avuncular in blue — is surreal and somewhat unnerving. You can see why Howard was nervous the night before interviewing them for the documentary. "I lay awake just the way I would before a big shooting day with a thousand extras and six cameras. These are stories they've touched on a lot. Once they started to see some rough cuts I think they saw the personal, humanistic approach I was going for. In the second interviews they were even more forthcoming and interesting. It was very gratifying."

As McCartney and Starr finish each other's stories, share jokes and chuckle over a minor anecdote about forgotten pop star Craig Douglas, the chemistry is so exhilaratingly reminiscent of their witty '60s press conferences that you can't help but mourn anew the absence of the late George Harrison and John Lennon. The Beatles were unusual in having four frontmen, each one equal and irreplaceable: a genuine band of brothers. During their touring years they were so tightly bonded that if one lit a cigarette, the other three would instinctively reach for the pack. Every important decision had to be unanimous. In the film, McCartney describes the Beatles as "a four-headed monster". Whatever challenges they faced during their white-hot ascendancy, loneliness wasn't one.

"We met Elvis and I thought, 'It's gotta be hard,'" says Starr. "He's on his own. We were a band and we supported each other. We could face each other during that screaming craziness. There was always a room full of us, not just one guy sitting in a corner and wondering what the hell is happening."

"Because we'd all come from Liverpool, we all knew what each other knew," says McCartney. "I knew the same records as John. George was like my neighbour. So it was instant recognition of all the facts. I think in the writing [that] was really helpful, too. You knew where all the others had come from, so you knew what they'd want to do."

The seed of *Eight Days A Week* was sown in the early '00s when production company One Voice One World, which specialises in music history, began gathering unseen photographs and Super 8 footage from fans who saw The Beatles live. A decade later, The Beatles' Apple Corps asked producer Nigel Lindsay if he would like to produce a film based on the archive.

Lindsay approached Howard while they were making *Rush*. The director, who had just made his first foray into music documentaries with his 2013 Jay Z concert movie *Made In America*, fancied the challenge. "Ron was quite conscious of the fact he wasn't a trainspotter Beatles fan," says Lindsay. "He said, 'Look, I'm interested in people in groups and how they operate. How did The Beatles stay sane and how did they operate inside their bubble? That's what I want to know.'" ›



As soon as Apple Corps formally announced the project, the filmmakers were swamped with fresh contributions from fans. By combining film clips with bootleg audio from the soundboards, Howard and his editor Paul Crowder could recreate Beatles performances like never before. "We've got better footage, better sound, we've got all the tools of the digital 21st century to make it feel like you're at a Beatles show," says Lindsay.

"We're the only people who never saw The Beatles because we were *being* them," says McCartney. "So it's nice for us. We get to see The Beatles perform live."

When Beatlemania first convulsed Britain in 1963, being at its centre was a thrill, but soon the screaming would overwhelm the PA system. "We loved it at the beginning," says Starr. "You should try it, brother. You're up there and you're like, 'Woah!' It did taper off, though, that joy."

"It got so as we couldn't really hear ourselves," says McCartney. "It was like millions of seagulls, that noise. And if we went, 'Wooo!' they'd scream even louder." He mimics the falsetto trill from *She Loves You*. "At first that was very exciting: Oh my God, all these girls screaming for us! Wow! And then after a while it was like, 'Yeah, okay girls, let's just have a listen to what we're playing now.' And you couldn't do that. You couldn't go back."

***Eight Days A Week* is the story of** The Beatles, but it's also about the teenagers who established behaviour that endures to this day. There are archive clips of fans explaining their obsession (one girl is very keen to draw a reporter's attention to George's "sexy eyelashes") and interviews with celebrities such as Richard Curtis and Elvis Costello recalling their Beatlemaniac days. Serendipity had a role to play, Howard finding out about Whoopi Goldberg's fandom while chatting on the set of *The View*, and reaching out to Sigourney Weaver after his team spotted her in the audience in some old concert footage.

Lindsay saw The Beatles at the Glasgow Odeon in April 1964, when he was 16. Around that time, he says, there would be a news story about the band in at least four of the eight daily papers every day. "The Beatles brought our culture to the centre of the stage and everybody loved them.













Backstage at Blackpool's Opera House, 1964. **Left, top to bottom**: Playing the Cavern Club in August 1962; Home in Liverpool in September 1962; Getting experimental at Abbey Road Studios, January 1967.

The feeling with my generation was: 'These are our guys.' Every single thing they did was cool."

There had been fan crazes before — teenage 'bobby-soxers' (teenage girls) went wild for Frank Sinatra in 1944 — but Beatlemania had television to illustrate to kids around the world what being a modern fan entailed. Howard later got a taste of it when *Happy Days* became a phenomenon in 1975. "Nothing should be compared to the Beatles, but it was like being in a boy band," he says. "There were crowds of 10,000 people and cars rocking and people tearing at your clothes and grabbing my hat." He fingers his black baseball cap and laughs. "Those hats have always meant something to me, even when I had a lot of hair."

In August 1965, such was the demand, The Beatles played the first-ever stadium rock concert at Shea Stadium in New York. The weedy PA was like a megaphone in a hurricane. "The fans could barely hear, The Beatles could barely hear, everyone reports the same thing," says Howard. "In the movie John calls it a freak show."

"It was the only way for us to go," says McCartney. "Fifty-six thousand people for the first time in our life, and in any music act's life... There we were, on this little stage in the middle of this bloody great place, so we got hysterical. That was a great way to deal with it because we always had a great laugh as a band. You'd be stuck in a van with the windscreen blown out and you'd have to lie on top of each other: a Beatles sandwich! So you had to laugh. We all had that Liverpool sense of humour, which saved us, I think."

Eventually, though, it wasn't fun anymore. The Beatles left Candlestick Park in a windowless meatwagon, an unimprovable metaphor for the besieged claustrophobia of fame. Apart from a one-off show on the roof of the Apple building one chilly day in January 1969 — the final scene of the movie — they'd never perform together in public again. What they did instead was produce a revolutionary series of records, starting with *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, that would have been impossible if they were still touring.

"It's the butterfly leaving the chrysalis," says Lindsay. "They were spiritually ready to become different people. What we tried to show is that these guys built up this mechanism for surviving [on the road] and, when they couldn't survive anymore, they took the ultimate decision. Paul said they had to have faith."

"I think a lot of lesser individuals would have folded to the very compelling argument that you're leaving piles of money on the table," says Howard. "I think that was a real act of courage. Certainly it was fuelled by fear, too. It was getting pretty dangerous and scary out there."

Starr, however, plays down the stress. "The reasons weren't that deep. It was just that we couldn't hear ourselves and we weren't playing great. It wasn't like, 'Oh, I'm psychologically impaired now that this is happening.'"

If you really want to know what The Beatles meant to their audiences, you need to ask the old fans. In the film, Whoopi Goldberg says, "I never really thought of them as white guys. They were The Beatles. The Beatles gave me the idea that everyone was welcome." We see the entire crowd at Anfield on match day, young and old alike, singing *She Loves You* like it was the new national anthem. Sigourney Weaver says it felt as if they were a passion that everybody could share.

"You can't say it could never happen again, but probably not in my lifetime," says Howard. "Having done this movie, I don't think the wheel of fortune was going to spin and it *had* to be somebody. I believe in creativity, intelligence, vision and ambition. That, plus their chemistry and brotherhood, made this unique thing possible."

When Lindsay first asked Howard to direct, he began by asking, "Do you like The Beatles?" Howard replied, "Of course. Everybody likes The Beatles." In an atomised culture with endless entertainment options, *Eight Days A Week* is a powerful reminder of a time when, if all the stars aligned, one band could be for everybody. Wooo!

***THE BEATLES: EIGHT DAYS A WEEK — THE TOURING YEARS* IS IN CINEMAS FROM 15 SEPTEMBER AND IS REVIEWED ON P.46**

FAB FOUR ON FILM

The best uses of The Beatles' recordings on screen



BABY, YOU'RE A RICH MAN
THE SOCIAL NETWORK

The Beatles provide the kicker in the final scene, as an alienated Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg) repeatedly checks to see if his ex has accepted his friend request.



TWIST AND SHOUT
FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF

One of the most jubilant, exhilarating scenes in film history sees truant teen Ferris (Matthew Broderick) co-opt an entire parade to lip-sync this early hit.



COME TOGETHER
A BRONX TALE

The rolling bass and slow build of one of the group's more sinister songs perfectly fits this clash between an unruly biker gang and Chazz Palminteri's Mob.



ROLL OVER BEETHOVEN
SUPERMAN III

Beatles collaborator Richard Lester gives this a brief blast at a school reunion dance: Clark Kent keeps jiving to it even after *Earth Angel* comes on instead.



WHEN I'M SIXTY-FOUR
THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP

McCartney's boppy tune set to a literally bouncing baby over the opening credits sets up the film's final moments where the baby reappears but not the song.



SPOILER WARNING

RE.VIEW

THE INDISPENSABLE GUIDE TO HOME ENTERTAINMENT

EDITED BY **CHRIS HEWITT**

THE EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

Take a deep dive into Marvel's epic grudge match

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**



THE EMPIRE VERDICT

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

★★★★★

CERT **12**

What we said: "Directors Joe and Anthony Russo don't just want to rocket your heart into your mouth with their action sequences; they want to keep your brain firmly engaged, too. The best Marvel Studios movie yet."

Notable extras: Commentary by the Russos and the writers; making of featurettes; a couple of deleted scenes; gag reel.



00:12:03

SKULL AND CROSSBONES __ Frank Grillo's *The Winter Soldier* bad guy, Brock Rumlow (aka Crossbones), is blown up (something Grillo grumbled about publicly) in the film's opening sequence. "We can't imagine he was super-jazzed," says writer Stephen McFeely. "But he's fundamentally connected to the Civil War," adds co-writer Christopher Markus. "Because of that explosion; the Avengers take the blame for it." ›



00:32:15

FAREWELL, AGENT CARTER __ An Avengers argument takes a poignant time out as Chris Evans' Steve Rogers acts as pall bearer at the funeral of his lost love, Peggy Carter, who dies off screen. "I saw someone on the internet who was bothered that we had killed Peggy by text," says McFeely. "She was 96. What scene did you want? And we had said farewell to her in the last movie, really."



01:09:23

CAP'S MASSIVE GUNS __ "Generally we don't describe specific muscles in the script," laughs Markus of the notorious moment where Steve displays his biceps and triceps as he tries to stop his old pal Bucky (Sebastian Stan) taking off in a helicopter. "That came down from a longer set-piece where Steve tried to catch the helicopter and was flown a few blocks," adds McFeely. "The Russos shaved it down to this one image."



01:28:39

THE AIRPORT FIGHT __ Leipzig/Halle airport hosts the film's standout action scene. It wasn't always set in an airport, though. "We also considered an abandoned amusement park, and Chernobyl came into the conversation," says co-director Joe Russo. Although the airport is largely digital, the production did shoot on location, an hour or so from Berlin. "There was a lot of space for us to come in and take over," adds Anthony Russo.



01:29:37

SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING __ The Russos thought hard about how to introduce Tom Holland's Spider-Man to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, plumping for him whipping Captain America's shield out of his hands before making a dramatic landing. "That was the way to announce him, without question," says Joe Russo. "If you're Tony Stark, grabbing Cap's shield is a very specific tactical approach. He's the first person you disarm."



01:37:57

"THIS IS YOUR CONSCIENCE." __ "Kevin Feige insisted upon it from early on," says Markus of the moment when Paul Rudd's Ant-Man gums up Iron Man's works. "He said, 'I don't care what else happens — Ant-Man is going inside Iron Man's armour.'" An early draft had a second Ant-Man also make an appearance. "Hank Pym was there and he could also show up because he hates Tony Stark," adds Markus.



01:39:12

GOING UP IN THE WORLD __ Turning Ant-Man into Giant-Man was also in the first draft. "It was the great turning point," says McFeely. "How could this thing get any crazier?" In the end, the huge hero is taken down after Spider-Man has an idea to emulate "that old movie – *Empire Strikes Back*" and target his legs. "At the time, Tom had never seen *The Empire Strikes Back*," says Anthony Russo. "It's hard to wrap your head around."



01:45:35

THE FALL OF RHODES __ The airport fight comes to a halt when Don Cheadle's War Machine falls to the ground, breaking his back. "We never entertained the idea of killing him," says Markus. "I don't think Captain America can fly away from a dead hero." War Machine will be back in *Avengers: Infinity War*. "We wanted to give Rhodey more story in the bank for later," adds Markus. "It's an exoskeleton. Things can still happen with this guy."



02:03:09

CIVIL WAR __ "Did you *know*?" "Yes." The pivotal moment when Robert Downey Jr's Tony Stark finds out a) Bucky murdered his parents and b) Steve knew about it finally turns Iron Man against his fellow Avenger. "Both actors were very excited for that moment," says Anthony Russo. "It was pretty late in the shoot." A version where Rogers says nothing "but Tony takes his silence as an assent" was shot but not used.



02:14:44

STANK THE MAN __ The film ends on a high note with Stan Lee's cameo as the confused FedEx guy who calls Stark 'Tony Stank'. "That is a Chris Markus original from draft one," laughs McFeely. "Although he was just a moronic messenger then. But we needed a place for Stan and there it was."

***CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR* IS OUT ON 30 AUGUST ON DOWNLOAD AND 5 SEPTEMBER ON DVD AND BLU-RAY**

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THE EMPIRE MASTERPIECE

THE DEVIL RIDES OUT

Hammer's greatest horror continues to cast a spell

1968 / CERT **15**

WORDS **KIM NEWMAN**

The current take on Hammer Horror tends to be 'once shocking, now cosy'. The films the studio made between *The Curse Of Frankenstein* (1957) and *To The Devil A Daughter* (1976) are held in enormous (and justified) affection for quality acting (from Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee), bosomy starlets, swashbuckling dash and full-blooded embrace of gothic melodrama. Amid the celebrations, it's easy to forget a simple fact: Hammer films could be terrifying.

The obsessive theme is good against evil — wracked with contradictions that mean it's not as easy to take sides as you might think. Watching a Hammer film is like flirting with evil all evening then going home with good at the end of the party. *The Devil Rides Out* (1967), in which Christopher Lee's Duc de Richleau battles Charles Gray and the forces of Satanic darkness, is chief among the studio's most subtly nightmarish horrors.

By the mid-1960s, Hammer management — especially producer Anthony Hinds, who was also a screenwriter and an inspired script editor (in today's terms he'd be called Hammer's showrunner) — had a sense their mini-franchises (*Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Quatermass* etc) were running down through repetition. So, they looked for fresh material and — supposedly thanks to an introduction made by Lee — struck a deal with author Dennis Wheatley, whose 'Black Magic' thrillers (mostly written in the 1930s) were enjoying strong paperback sales thanks to a minor occult revival (blame The Beatles for putting Aleister Crowley on the *Sgt*



Christopher Lee's Duc de Richleau and pals pause for macabre thought.

Pepper album cover).

Hinds assigned script duties to American novelist Richard Matheson (*I Am Legend*, *Hell House*), who streamlined the frankly stodgy book to focus on its simple, disturbing plot. Terence Fisher, who perfected the Hammer horror style in the late 1950s, seized the chance to again demonstrate his icy skills. This is Fisher's best job of direction: he avoids too much psychedelia (look at any other occult horror from the period for contrast) and is restrained yet forceful in depicting spiritual evil. The Goat Of Mendes is a startling apparition, but its Satanist worshippers are nattily robed in purple and their wild abandon is desperate rather than titillating. A holdover from Wheatley is the coven's mix of, at the time, racial and sexual exotics, and one manifestation which doesn't play well today has stern anti-Satanist Duc de Richleau (Lee) terrified by a demon who looks like a tall, smiling black man in baggy orange shorts. Only Lee's intense commitment sells the horror — "Don't look at the eyes, Rex!"

That Lee plays what would usually be the Peter Cushing role of occult-savvy mentor is unusual in itself — as when traditional white hat Henry Fonda is an outlaw in *Once Upon A Time In The West*. Lee's Duc is unwaveringly right but brusque and rude (he is always calling his friends fools or worse), while epicene baddie Mocata (Gray) is silky, charming and reasonable (though his ritual plan involves murdering a child). Audaciously, the central set-piece isn't an atrocity but a conversation. Mocata pays a call on Marie (Sarah Lawson) — who is sheltering a runaway from his cult — and tries to impose his will on her through lulling words (it's not just the acting — editing and progressive close-ups make a drawing room chat frightening) until the spell is broken by her daughter barging into the room. Then, the villain utters one of the most chilling lines in Hammer history: "I shall not be back ... but something will."

This sets up a climax in which the Duc and allies stay inside a protective magic circle despite temptations and torments until the Angel Of Death itself appears to claim some poor victim. It's another theatrical conceit, building from social awkwardness — a stalwart normal bloke (Paul Eddington) insists this is all foolish while the Duc glowers all-knowingly — through an all-out assault by the forces of darkness checked only when the Duc barks out "the Unknown Last Line of the Saaamaaa Ritual" and sunders time and space in a trippy manner which unrolls the last half of the film to change the outcome (for the better) in an avant-garde manner that feels startlingly modern nearly half-a-century on.

Most Hammer horrors have Victorian settings, but *The Devil Rides Out* is set in 1929 — with vintage cars featured in pell-mell chases through country lanes and stylish flapper fashions for waif-like cult defectee Tanith (Niké Arrighi). Fisher relishes this Bulldog Drummond/pre-Hollywood Hitchcock little England, where heroes biff baddies (or hysterical women) squarely on the chin and asking Duc for a lend of a motor is answered with a throwaway, "Yes, take any of them." But the point is, these smug, rose-pruning, brandy-at-the-club types are in real danger from forces of darkness they ignore at their peril. Though even with the towering, goateed Lee as their only bulwark against the fiend, the happy ending (underlined by James Bernard's delicate, spiritual score) seems provisional. The Devil, we suspect, will ride again...

***THE DEVIL RIDES OUT* IS OUT NOW ON DVD AND BLU-RAY**

KIDS WATCH CLASSICS

Big films tackled by little people

ILLUSTRATION **OLLY GIBBS**



ALAIDA RITCHIE – 6
THE WIZARD OF OZ

What did you think of *The Wizard Of Oz*?
It was amazing.

What did you like best?
Dorothy. I liked her because she had a very positive reason for wanting to go to see the Wizard Of Oz.

Which of her friends did you like best?
I liked the... what was the metal one called again?

The Tin Man.
The Tin Man. I liked him because he had a heart for Dorothy.

What did you think of the Wizard himself?
At first he was a bit mean, because he told them to "come back tomorrow". But in the end he was really nice, because he gave them all medals and stuff. That meant "good work".

Why do you think Glinda the Good Witch didn't tell Dorothy how to get home when they first met?
[*Long pause*] Because she wanted her to find out for herself.

What did you think of the songs?
They were amazing. My favourite one was *If I Only Had A Brain*, because it was really silly and funny.

Was there anything you didn't like?
I didn't like that it wasn't all in colour.

How many stars would you give it?
Five stars!

Who do you think would enjoy the film?
My friends. Some boys and some girls. A mixture.



GREEN GIANT

How director Jeremy Saulnier and Patrick Stewart created the year's most chilling villain

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**

HE'S AN UNASSUMING bloke in his seventies, clad in spectacles and a homely sweater/jacket combo, who barely talks above a whisper. But when Patrick Stewart's Darcy Banker rolls into *Green Room*, roughly 22 minutes in, it heralds the arrival of 2016's most terrifying screen villain. "There are no two ways about it," says Jeremy Saulnier, the film's writer/director, "when Darcy walks on screen, he's totally in charge."

The leader of the neo-Nazi gang who hold an unfortunate punk band, The Ain't Rights, hostage in the green room of their scuzzy, remote, Portland venue after they witness a murder, Darcy is cool-headed, coldly sadistic, and hugely quotable. Saulnier based the character on a number of men he'd had the misfortune to encounter in the punk-rock scene on both sides of the Atlantic, but after a fruitless search for an American actor to play the role, and with just ten days to go before production began, he rolled the dice with Stewart, a man who's played out-and-out sods before, but is more renowned for playing starship captains and psychic professors. "I never presumed that Patrick would do a film like mine," he says. "But he got it, and wanted to disappear into the role I created. It was very flattering."

The story of how Stewart was so discomfited by reading Saulnier's script that, just 30 pages in, he got up and made sure all the doors in his house were locked and all the lights were on, is already legend. "But it's absolutely true," says Stewart. "That is how much the screenplay had unnerved me in just the first 30 pages."

After that, Stewart dived into the character's look. The beard came first ("I kindly requested that he start growing a beard," recalls Saulnier, "and he had already stopped shaving"), then the glasses. "I spent an hour in my local opticians in Brooklyn going through boxes and boxes and boxes of spectacles," laughs Stewart. In the end, he found the perfect pair only once he arrived on the film's set. Then came Darcy's manner — calm, reassuring, atypical of your average movie villain. "I asked Patrick to deliver the quietest performance of his career on stage and screen," says Saulnier.

Nowhere is Darcy quieter than in what Saulnier calls "the infamous scene 58", where Darcy, standing in the corridor outside the green room, calmly explains to the band their options, before it all promptly goes to shit. It's a chilling scene, partially because of Darcy's brutal pragmatism ("You're trapped. That's not a threat, that's a fact"), and partially because Stewart, owner of one of the world's great voices, delivers his lines through a wall in a near-whisper, forcing the actors on the other side to strain to hear him. Although Stewart was there, and Saulnier placed a camera on him, he chose not to cut away to Darcy during the monologue. "I felt we would use the shark-in-*Jaws* approach," explains the director. "Putting a camera on Patrick put the heat on him, he was interacting with the kids, and they were actually terrified. But in the edit room it felt so anticlimactic to see him talking. It's about the unseen power of Darcy."

Spoiler alert: it doesn't end well for most of *Green Room*'s characters. That certainly applies to Darcy, who gets put out of his misery as, cornered by Anton Yelchin's Pat and Imogen Poots' Amber, he tries to make a slow escape across some fields. "We called it a defiant march," says Saulnier of Darcy's doomed dash for





Main: Patrick Stewart's Darcy, not a man to be messed with. **Above:** Jeremy Saulnier directs Stewart on location.

freedom, which was shot on Stewart's second day. "We even say it aloud in dialogue — he was so scary at night and now, exposed to daylight, he's just a regular person."

Apart from a brief insert shot where Pat glimpses Darcy in the corridor, the end of the movie is the only time that *Green Room*'s hero and villain meet. "It's great having the two adversaries never lay eyes on each other," says Saulnier. But that structure meant that Stewart found himself very much removed from Yelchin, Poots and the rest of The Ain't Rights. "The only time I hung out with Anton and the other members of the band was one night when their car hadn't shown up," he says. "I gave them a ride back into Portland." Despite their shared *Star Trek* backgrounds, Stewart had only met Yelchin once prior to shooting, at the Tribeca Film Festival. But the young actor, who died so tragically in June at the age of 27, made quite the impression. "I am immensely sad when I think of the tragedy of Anton," says Stewart. "It has not left me and probably never will leave me."

Since wrapping on *Green Room*, Stewart has, by his own reckoning, completed "two movies, two seasons of a half-hour comedy show, and I'm about to go on tour with a play." Yet Darcy Banker has proved hard to shift. "I've seen the film a handful of times and it still makes me uncomfortable," he says. "I was thrilled with it and very satisfied with Darcy, this mild-mannered individual who is as bad a guy as you're ever likely to encounter." That's not a threat. That's a fact.

***GREEN ROOM* IS OUT ON 12 SEPTEMBER ON DOWNLOAD AND 19 SEPTEMBER ON DVD**

THE EMPIRE VERDICT

GREEN ROOM

★★★★

CERT **18**

What we said: "A riotous, rough-hewn and rousing punk reinvention of '70s-style grindhouse exploitation-with-a-brain cinema."

Notable extras: Commentary by Saulnier, a brief making of.

KIM NEWMAN'S VIDEO DUNGEON

The very best (and, occasionally, worst) movies making their DTV debut





PICK OF THE MONTH
i-LIVED

The Faust story (man makes a pact with the devil; regrets it) has been told and retold since the 15th century with good reason, as each age finds fresh meaning in it. In *i-Lived*, writer-director Franck Khalfoun pertinently skewers brand-new digital age sins alongside familiar age-old cruelties.

Here, vlogger Josh (Jeremiah Watkins) starts using i-Lived, a smartphone life-coaching app which promises to help him attain his goals with a series of challenges and rewards: a six-pack, more followers, a hot girlfriend, getting his landlady off his back, remission for his mother's terminal illness. Of course, as the app's name suggests, there's a sinister side to self-improvement. The wittiest element is that here the soul-selling contract with the devil is in the "terms and conditions" Josh scrolls through without reading.

In the early 2000s, a cluster of films (the Thai *13: Game Of Death*, the French *13 Tzameti* and their US remakes) had hapless protagonists enter games that require an escalating series of crimes to gain the ultimate reward while losing dignity, mind and soul. *i-Lived* is the Pokémon GO-era version of that story, with YouTube clips, Skype calls, remote-access security cams and tech frills deployed for horrors. Khalfoun (*P2*, the *Maniac* remake) and lead actor Watkins (carrying the film with nervous energy) start light with a zeitgeisty comedy about relationships in the age of social media, before Josh's missions become more dangerous. Meanwhile a mystery man with a black umbrella dogs his digital footprint — an enigmatic touch that isn't overexplained.

DOUBLE BILL OF THE MONTH

Two horrors called *The Boy*. Craig William Macneill's is a slow-burn study of a sociopath; William Brent Bell's is a hokier old-house gothic.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The five-fingered ones were jealous. They rose against our people. Soon it was more than your life was worth to have six fingers." *Masters Of Venus*

GATOR BAIT OF THE MONTH

Zoë Bell versus a killer who uses an albino alligator as a weapon? Sometimes obvious comebacks are irresistible: sadly, *Freshwater* is foul.



THE FORGOTTEN TREK

The lowdown on the newly released *Star Trek: The Animated Series*

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**

The series launched in September 1973, just four years after the live-action *Star Trek* had been cancelled. It ran on Saturday mornings.

Gene Roddenberry, the creator of *Star Trek*, was behind the revival, but took a hands-off approach, hiring *Trek* writer Dorothy 'DC' Fontana to be the script editor and associate producer. "The first thing I said was, 'Is it going to be *Star Trek*?'" recalls Fontana. "He said yes, so I said yes immediately, because I knew Gene was utterly opposed to any kind of cadet version, kiddie version, or teenage version of *Star Trek*."

The Animated Series is perhaps alone in franchise spin-offs in having virtually the entire cast return to provide voices. "At first we were only going to use William Shatner [Kirk], Leonard Nimoy [Spock] and DeForest Kelley [Bones]," says Fontana. "Jimmy Doohan came along because he could do all sorts of voices," including Scotty, his signature *Trek* turn.

Shatner, Nimoy and Kelley initially refused to sign on until the rest of the crew were accounted for, so George Takei [Sulu] and Nichelle Nichols [Uhura] were also brought on board.

The show's tight budget ("I think it was about $80,000 per episode," says Fontana) meant that one cast member didn't return: Walter Koenig's Chekov. "We just could not afford Walter," says Fontana. Chekov's role on the crew was taken by two aliens, M'Ress and Arex.

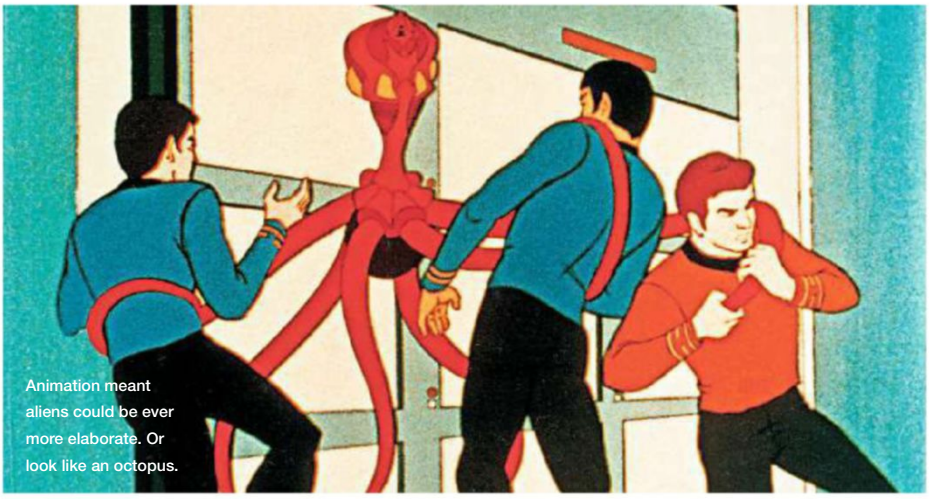
Walter Koenig was offered the chance to write an episode — *The Infinite Vulcan*. "He wanted to demonstrate that he could be a good writer," says David Gerrold, a long-standing *Trek* writer. "I bought a script from him when I produced the TV show *Land Of The Lost*. He's a very talented man."

Thanks to a writers' strike at the time of the first season, the show was able to draw from a pool of incredible sci-fi writers who were mooching around at a loose end, unable to write for live action — including Larry Niven, who had just written the first novel of his *Ringworld* series. "We took advantage of it," says Fontana.

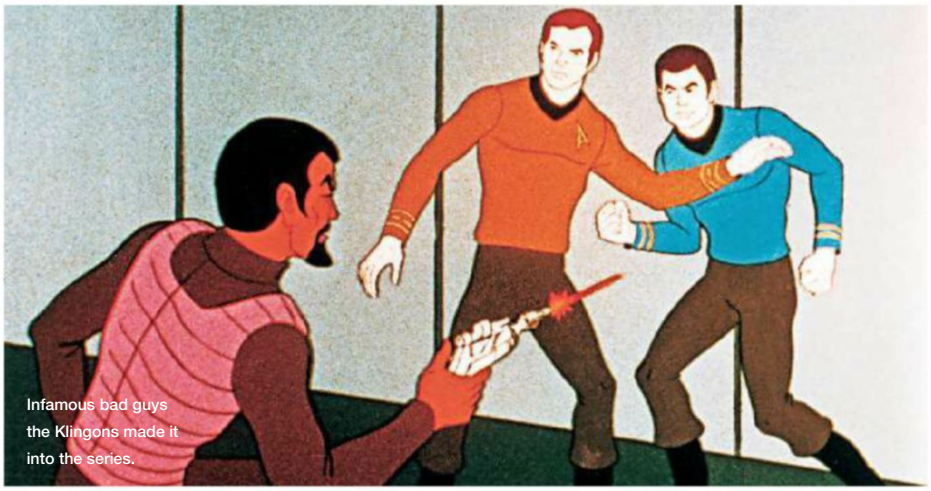
Larry Niven's episode, *The Slaver Weapon*, introduced a new race, the felinoid Kzinti. "I had to apologise to Larry," laughs Fontana. "Their spacesuits were painted pink because Hal Sutherland, the director, was colour-blind, and for him pink was just a shade of grey."

Gerrold, who wrote the iconic episode *The Trouble With Tribbles* for the live-action show in 1967, scripted a follow-up, *More Tribbles, More Troubles*, for the first season of the animated series. "I had a lot of fun," he says. "Although I had to write almost as much story as for a full-hour episode, because animation moves so fast."

Debate has raged for years over whether the show is canon — in essence, if the events that occurred on *The Animated Series* are officially recognised within *Star Trek* timelines. Echoing something Fontana has said, Gerrold weighs in,



Animation meant aliens could be ever more elaborate. Or look like an octopus.



Infamous bad guys the Klingons made it into the series.



Bones and his new pals, the Dramans.

"Gene Roddenberry put his name on it and collected the cheques. To me, that makes it canon."

Something Gerrold wrote as a throwaway gag for his Season 2 episode, *Bem*, is now a huge part of *Star Trek* lore: namely, he's the guy who gave James T Kirk his middle name. "I was at a convention and I think I had just read a book about Roman emperors," he says. "Someone said, 'What does the T stand for?' and without thinking I said, 'Tiberius.' It got a good laugh, and a year later I asked if I could put it in the episode."

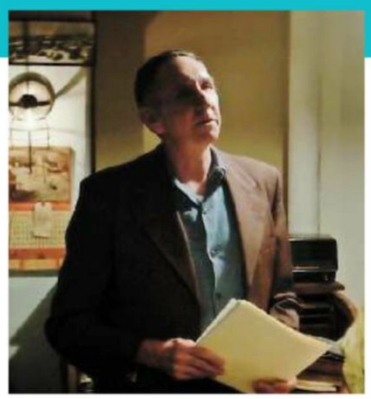
Fontana's episode *Yesteryear*, explores the childhood of Spock, and sees him wrestle with the impending death of I-Chaya, his pet sehlat. "He's dying and Spock says to euthanise him, basically. NBC were concerned, but Roddenberry said, 'Trust Dorothy,'" recalls Fontana. "We did not get one letter of complaint."

Although fans loved the show, the ratings in its Saturday morning time slot weren't good enough for NBC, who pulled the plug in October 1974 after a six-episode second season (with which Fontana wasn't involved). "I felt it could have done more episodes," she says. "I don't think NBC gave it enough time. But those 22 episodes are really good episodes. It's *Star Trek*."

***STAR TREK: 50TH ANNIVERSARY TV AND MOVIE COLLECTION* IS OUT ON 5 SEPTEMBER ON BLU-RAY**

MAN ON TRAIN

The bit-part players who stand out



THIS MONTH: RICHARD JACKSON IN *I SAW THE LIGHT*

Richard Jackson can claim something that would make him the envy of millions: he married Tom Hiddleston. Or, to be more accurate, he played the Justice Of The Peace who presided over the marriage of Hiddleston's Hank Williams and Elizabeth Olsen's Audrey Sheppard in the memorable gas-station scene at the start of *I Saw The Light*. A Texan by birth, Jackson says he never felt the need to weigh in with advice for Hiddleston on his West Virginia accent. "I'm always amazed at how many of these English guys are coming over here now to play these roles," laughs Jackson. "But I thought he got it real good."

I Saw The Light took up just a day of Jackson's career — a career that began reasonably late in life, when he was pushing 40 and feeling unfulfilled in a career in semiconductor processing ("making silicon chips for computers and stuff"). After taking an acting class on a whim, he was roped into being an extra on the Grassy Knoll when Oliver Stone came to town with *JFK*. "It was like being there for real," he recalls.

Bug bit, he's still acting 25 years on, combining it with growing vegetables and hunting deer on his 60-acre farm. He's already got another half-dozen films in the can, but his favourite on-set experience remains *No Country For Old Men*, in which he played Chicken Farmer. "I'd always wanted to work with the Coen Brothers, so that one was a dream come true," he says. "If people recognise me at all, it's still for that part. Although I guess that doesn't happen to me as much as it does to Tom!" **OW**

***I SAW THE LIGHT* IS OUT ON 29 AUGUST ON DOWNLOAD AND 12 SEPTEMBER ON DVD**



A class act: Gregory (John Gordon Sinclair) with *objet de désir* Dorothy (Dee Hepburn).

MOVIE MEMOIRS

Sali Hughes on the films that shaped her life

#3 GREGORY'S GIRL – THE CLOSE-TO-HOME FILM



ILLUSTRATION **DAVID MAHONEY**

AFTER ENOUGH VODKA, I've been known to argue loudly that *Gregory's Girl* is the greatest movie ever made. Which is ironic, given that when I first walked into my childhood living room and saw a bunch of Scottish comp kids on the telly, discussing the ethics of veal, I momentarily mistook it for a documentary.

Films were a big deal in my family, yet I had never before seen one about people like us. At home I'd watch American comedies and blockbusters such as *Trading Places*, *Rocky* and *Jaws* on VHS. Cosied up on my nana's sofa I'd get lost in such British classics as *Kind Hearts And Coronets* and *Brief Encounter*, all clipped upper-RP accents spoken by men with staffs and women in dress gloves. When the films ended there'd be a truckdriver's gear change from movie life to real life, dramatic to mundane. Only now, in Bill Forsyth's suburban Cumbernauld, was a cast of characters I already knew, who wouldn't bat a lash that we were watching on a telly with a bank of 50 pence pieces welded to the back. In an instant, I felt that films were no longer something I watched. They were something I was part of.

Pre-*Gregory*, I'd loved the fantasy, of course. I still do. Part of film's magic and importance is its ability to transport us to 1920s Brooklyn, the slums of Mumbai, an Old West saloon or a galaxy far, far away. For 120 minutes, we inhabit new worlds and realise that everyone is essentially cut from the same cloth. But sometimes ordinary people need to feel there's sufficient narrative richness in their own lives. Teenage Gregory's love for football protégée Dorothy was as deep as Scarlett's for Rhett, or Tarzan's for Jane. His whole milieu — working parents you largely ignored, shaggy perms and pervy PE teachers, a grass-stained pulling jacket and a school shirt sticking to Mum roll-on after games — resonated so strongly that I ended up renting *Gregory's Girl* 43 times in a year (yes, really), until my stepfather frogmarched me back to Yates's Video and demanded back his quid.

There's also a level of gratitude, unconscious or otherwise, in seeing the circumstances and challenges of your community writ large on the screen where no-one can ignore them. I've spent my adult life as a Welsh Valleys girl in the South East, meeting people who lived through the Miners' Strike as a diminishing item on breakfast TV while they got on with their cornflakes. Since the release of *Pride*, there's a new level of understanding, a respect beyond Tom Jones impressions and sheep-shagging jokes. I have northern friends who feel similarly about Ken Loach dramas. *Gregory's Girl*, with its laughs, love, close friendships and low-level boredom, described my life before I realised it was worth describing. Insidiously, the idea you could write about your own boring life and people might be interested was implanted for future use.

British working-class films became an obsession that would run through my childhood and permanently into my heart. Their characters felt like old friends. Rita and Sue, in *Rita, Sue And Bob Too!*, dancing to Bananarama, beige buffet in hands, Margi Clarke's hard, defensive gobshite who'd take a bullet for her best mate in *Letter To Brezhnev*, *This Is England*'s uneasy brotherhood, the eponymous heroine in *Educating Rita* who could've been any of my mates' big sisters. But it was *Gregory's Girl* that turned film from a window to a mirror, and taught me to like what I saw.

ASH VS EVIL DEAD

The bloody best of Bruce Campbell's *Evil Dead* series



1_ASH VS DEADITE

Ash Vs Evil Dead is, essentially, an extended *Evil Dead IV*, following Bruce Campbell's reluctant hero, Ash, in his battle against the Deadites. Episode one, directed by Sam Raimi, gets straight into the swing of things with a gloriously splattery showdown in Ash's trailer.



2_ASH VS ASH

Now back in the famous wooden cabin in episode eight, a new Evil Ash has grown from the original's severed hand. Cue a hilarious moron-a-moron Two Stooges dust-up, where each knows the other's physical weakness. "You have a trick knee!" "Aargh, my trick knee!" And so on.



3_ASH VS DEMON CHILD

Episode ten's big stand-out scene, in which Ash has a knock-down drag-out battle with a small, possessed boy who keeps relentlessly biting his thigh, is deeply, deeply wrong, but manages to be just about the funniest thing in the whole series. And that's some achievement.

***ASH VS EVIL DEAD* IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD AND 26 SEPTEMBER ON DVD**



Sir James Martin (Tom Bennett) hides some inappropriate pea eating. **Below:** Lady Susan Vernon (Kate Beckinsale) with potential suitor the hapless Sir Martin.

PEAS AND QS

Get to know *Love & Friendship*'s breakout star, Tom Bennett

WORDS **CHRIS HEWITT**

IT IS A truth universally acknowledged that, of all the many virtues of Whit Stillman's sharp, witty Jane Austen adaptation, *Love & Friendship*, Tom Bennett's performance as the hapless imbecile, Sir James Martin, is top of the heap. Whether he's burbling about Moses bringing 12 commandments down from the mount or expressing a love of peas, Bennett's Sir James is one of the stand-out comedic performances of the year to date.

How did you get the role?
It was just another audition. Once I left the room, I forgot it ever happened. As a jobbing actor, nine times out of ten you don't hear anything again, so to protect myself I forget it happened.

What's the secret of Sir James' appeal?
He's a loveable idiot. And if anyone knows anything of my career, it's that I play lovable idiots. I am a classically trained actor so I can do shouting and crying and cursing, but I seem to have a natural advantage when it comes to idiots with shit-eating grins. My dad made a career out of it.

Your dad is Colin Bennett, who played Mr Bennett, the caretaker, on *Hartbeat*. Right?
Yes. There are people probably going, "is he really?" If I was lying, I'd say I was Alan Bennett's son.

Were you ever on the show, then?
Dad used to do sketches for the show and they'd shoot in our garden or in the house. Most of them would involve a young child, so to save money he'd hire me. I had a picture in The Gallery once.

Back to *Love & Friendship*. The peas scene, where Sir James encounters the "tiny green balls" for the first time, is wonderful. Where did that come from?
Whit Stillman. He said, "I'm going to stay up all night and write a scene about peas, and give it to Tom in the morning." He wrote several new scenes for me, which is very flattering. The tough one was the 12 commandments. I was in make-up and was given a four-page monologue. I had to bribe the hair and make-up girls to spend an extra 20 minutes so I could stuff the monologue into my face.



We have to ask — do you like peas?
I love peas. Frozen Bird's Eye. Frozen peas are the way forward, cooked with a knob of butter on top.

***LOVE & FRIENDSHIP* IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD AND 26 SEPTEMBER ON DVD AND BLU-RAY**

THE EMPIRE VERDICT

LOVE & FRIENDSHIP
★★★★★
CERT **U**

What we said:
The funniest, most deliciously venomous Jane Austen movie ever made. Conclusive proof that Kate Beckinsale has been seriously undervalued by the movies and Whit Stillman is a major, distinctive talent.
Notable extras: A behind-the scenes featurette.



Clockwise from here: Martin Short, Dennis Quaid and Meg Ryan in Dante's 1987 film *Innerspace*; Dante happily on the *Innerspace* set; John Goodman holding court in *Matinee* (1993).

DANTE'S PEAKS

Joe Dante looks back at his eclectic career

PIRANHA _ (1978)

A ROGER CORMAN PROTÉGÉ, DANTE BROUGHT HIS LOW-BUDGET SKILL SET TO THIS *JAWS* RIP-OFF

"I was worried that it was the worst movie ever made. I didn't even go to the wrap party. I literally didn't leave the editing room after we finished shooting. You lose your perspective completely: you start wondering if these piranhas are more believable if the shots of them are three frames long or six frames... It was all an elaborate con game to make it look like we knew what we were doing. To my amazement it not only turned out to be a hit, but it kind of put me on the map, which was very surprising."

THE HOWLING _ (1981)

WEREWOLF HORROR-COMEDY WHICH DUELLED WITH JOHN LANDIS' *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*

"We'd asked Rick Baker to do *The Howling*, and he started work. Then John Landis heard we were making it and suddenly the money appeared for him to do his werewolf picture, so Rick went to work with John and we bumped up Rob Bottin. It was difficult to do as we had very little money for the effects. We originally had guys in suits for the wolves, and they just looked like bears, so we went back and did re-shoots with puppets, which was far more effective."

GREMLINS _ (1984)

DANTE TEAMED UP WITH PRODUCER STEVEN SPIELBERG FOR THIS ICONIC CREATURE FEATURE

"It was a lucky movie for me. It kind of snuck under the radar. Even though it was a Spielberg movie it wasn't heavily publicised while we were making it, so when it emerged it was a sleeper. Very few filmmakers are lucky enough to have a phenomenon. That was mine, and it essentially kept me working for the next ten years."

INNERSPACE _ (1987)

HIGH-CONCEPT SCI-FI COMEDY WHERE DENNIS QUAID IS SHRUNK AND INJECTED *INSIDE* MARTIN SHORT

"Initially it wasn't a comedy: the script was a straight spy movie with the same plot, which I though was pretty unbelievable. I didn't want to do it, but the studio hired Jeffrey Boam to re-write it, and he turned it into a comedy, based on what would happen if you shrank down Dean











Martin and injected him into Jerry Lewis. That was a concept I could get behind."

THE 'BURBS _ (1989)

TOM HANKS THINKS HIS NEW NEIGHBOURS ARE KILLERS IN THIS HIGHLY STYLISED BLACK COMEDY

"I constantly run into people saying they've seen it hundreds of times and they have *'Burbs* parties at their houses. It was the only movie being shot in Hollywood that summer because of a writers' strike. It was just us and the Universal studio tour on the lot. It was the backlot that made the movie work. It helped the fairy-tale aspect of the movie in a way a location wouldn't have."

GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH _ (1990)

THE GREMLINS RETURN IN A BONKERS SEQUEL THAT INITIALLY FLOPPED

"Over the years it's become a very popular movie. And now Donald Trump is running for President, and our lead villain [John Glover's Daniel Clamp] is a combination of Trump and Ted Turner, it seems to have gained currency again. It's one of those movies you look at and think, 'Did they really let me get away with that?'"

MATINEE _ (1993)

DANTE'S LOVE LETTER TO '50s B MOVIES AND OLD-SCHOOL FILM PRODUCER WILLIAM CASTLE

"When the president of the studio saw it, his reaction was, 'It's not a bad movie but how the hell am I going to sell it?' And he was right: it's a studio movie that's really an indie. We shot *Mant!* — the film within the film — first. I love those '50s B movies, so the special effects in *Mant!* aren't bad at all. It's a bit of a cheat because *Matinee* is set in 1962 and they really stopped making movies like that in the '50s. But it gets the point across."

BURYING THE EX _ (2014)

ANTON YELCHIN STARS AS A YOUNG MAN WHOSE GIRLFRIEND BECOMES A ZOMBIE

"As a movie it's really just silly trifle, but it's got a great cast. I became very close to Anton. He was a remarkable actor: not that he gets to show it [here]. He was a dyed-in-the-wool movie buff. He reminded me of myself when I was his age, except I hadn't yet made a movie. His loss is very tragic. I think he would have been a major player."

***MATINEE* IS OUT ON 12 SEPTEMBER ON BLU-RAY**

THE EMPIRE VERDICT

MATINEE

★★★

CERT **PG**

What we said: "Likely to appeal to '50s horror movie anoraks... the pastiche black-and-white *Mant!* footage and spoof trailers should tickle those unaware of what they're meant to be parodying."

Notable extras: Interviews, rare on-set footage and the full-length version of *Mant!*.



LISTEN TO YOUR FRIEND BILLY ZANE

He's a cool guy. He's trying to help you

Hi Billy,
Last year, I met a girl through a friend. I started to like her but a group of us had planned on going on holiday together, so I didn't want to do anything until after the trip. That didn't go to plan, and we hooked up one night. We then started chatting loads, and she messaged me every day. We had loads in common, so I arranged to go see her to hang out. She wasn't well, so I brought her some junk food to help cheer her up, and we had a great night watching movies, TV, and chatting. When I went to leave, I tried to kiss her and she pulled away. I dialled it back since I didn't want to make the holiday awkward, but then it was. She seemed to be very angry at me and I tried to see if we could go back to being friends. She apologised for the fight, but now we don't speak. Do you think there is any way to salvage this friendship, or should I just call it a day?
Yours, **AM**

As much as I would like to, I cannot tell you to write off this mood-swinger as a bullet dodged. I'm afraid I cannot because the data is flawed, AM. It's tainted principally by your own hand in that your gift of peace was in fact a poison pill, my friend. Note to self: never give junk food as a romantic offering. Period. And certainly do not expect lasting joy and sanity from your yet-to-be-closed object of affection beyond the wicked sugar crash your overtures will surely outlast. Otherwise, err on the side of caution and lay some creative, thoughtful, romantic fare at their feet next time. But with this one, it might be a lost cause. But if you feel your study is incomplete, get back into the field and run some more tests.

Hi Billy,
My sister and I recently had a huge falling out over… well, let's just say a certain political situation. We get on well most of the time but she said something to me that bordered on the xenophobic at best, and at worst, racist. I'm finding it hard to forgive her. What should I do?
Yours, **KP**

Just remember this day, your stellar tolerance and rational worldview, KP, when she brings an unexpected boyfriend home to meet the family. Remember, everything changes. She'll come round. Be the tolerance you want her to be. Forgive her. Remember that life is short.

Dear Billy,
Huge fan — can't believe you might actually read my letter! I've got a film-related question: I've written a short film (don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to read my script), and I don't know what to do next. Should I Kickstart it or something? Loved you in *The Phantom*!
Yours, **TS**

Thanks, TS. Much appreciated! First, consider if this short is a pitch tool for a long-form feature or a standalone short-form piece of media. Then, once happy with the material and its endgame target, register your script online at the Writers Guild West (WGA) or English equivalent. My advice? Go Hollywood with this matter. Absolutely intend to direct it. Make a compelling teaser demonstrating why you should, on your iPhone. Pursue crowdfunding while you are asking friends and family to support your film. At least you'll have something to show them as evidence of your commitment and vision. Good luck!

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO BILLY ZANE VIA BILLY@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM. BILLY HAS DONATED HIS FEE FOR THIS COLUMN TO CHARITY

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GEOFFREY RUSH

WORDS **IAN FREER**





COSTUME

***Shakespeare In Love* was the most thrilling costume fitting. [Costume designer] Sandy Powell brought a drawing of a guy dressed in the worst shades of kaka brown. He looked like some kind of Elizabethan stink bug.**

I don't think I've ever been lumbered with a costume I didn't like. There are difficult ones, like Ra the Sun God in *Gods Of Egypt*. That was three-and-a-half hours in make-up because of the bald-singed golden head.

DIRECTION

On *Shine*, which was my second role in a film and I was in my forties, I said to [director] Scott Hicks, "I am playing a character who has got an extraordinary, effusive, aberrant personality. How do I keep that in the frame?" And he said, "I will let you know when you are not being truthful. You can be as big in the frame as you want. Look at [Eisenstein's] *Ivan The Terrible*."



I hate that every director now sits by a monitor. [*The Tailor Of Panama* director] John Boorman never sat by a monitor. He would sit right next to the lens. That triggered something in me from my theatre experience. It's like having your mother in the front row. You think, "I've got to be really good in this beat."

FAN ENCOUNTER

I was in *Hamlet* and the theatre would offer a free performance for the unwaged. A guy came up to us, he must have been in his sixties, and said, "I'm HIV positive, I live in the council flats over the road and this is the first piece of theatre I have ever seen." He was in tears.

You get some backhanded comments. "I thought the film was great but I thought you were awful." When people come up and say something generic like, "I love your work," there is an impulse in you that wants to say, "Name one."

LOCATION

We were shooting *Frida* at the pyramids near Mexico City. There was this extraordinary light in the sky, at 4am. I said to the driver, "Is that a plane landing?" He said, "No, that's Venus."





Any time I get in a car — I can't drive. On *The Tailor Of Panama*, every time I got in the car, I'd turn the windscreen wipers on. I'd lean on the horn and the sound guys would be going, "What the fuck?"

MOMENT

When I did the pelican in *Finding Nemo*. This is a great leveller. They film you when you are recording the voices and I splay my hands a lot. Of course, the animators used all that and had Nigel's feathery extremities doing what I did. My kids said, "Dad, that's amazing. That pelican has got your nose." It's a running family joke that I have a big nose.



I've considered giving up several times. Prior to getting into film, I was doing a lot of theatre. There was a point where I felt a great degree of burn-out. My daughter was born at that point. I thought I could help raise her or just wait and see what happens. I felt in a pretty exhilarating state of freefall.

***THE DAUGHTER* IS OUT ON 19 SEPTEMBER ON DVD AND DOWNLOAD**

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BINGEWATCH

Each month, our bingemaster straps himself to a sofa for a full-on viewing marathon

THIS MONTH: CHUCK NORRIS

WORDS **SIMON CROOK** ILLUSTRATION **PETER STRAIN**

BEFORE THE STATH. Before The Rock. Before Arnie, Sly, and possibly the creation of the universe, there was The Chuck. Unleashed in an action era that got its kicks from cars and guns, Chuck didn't need weapons. A former six-time Professional Middleweight Karate Champion, he *was* the weapon: the lightning bolt that birthed the macho, muscley, one-man-army badass.

Chuck's evolution as action icon started with an almighty pasting at the hands of Bruce Lee, his former sparring partner. Beard-free, with Weetabix sideburns, Chuck rocks up late in *The Way Of The Dragon* (1972), an end-of-level boss hired by Mafia goons to eradicate Lee. Staged inside Rome's Colosseum, the ten-minute death-match — sparse, wordless, wide-framed — is breath-stealingly brutal. Lee breaks Chuck's arm, his leg, rips out his chest hair and snaps his neck. It's fair to say Chuck never forgot the beating. In every subsequent movie, he's utterly, Chuckily invincible.

By 1980's *The Octagon*, Chuck was Hollywood's martial-arts king. Said Octagon is a ninja-terrorist camp run by Chuck's evil step-brother. Uncleverly camouflaged in black IN BROAD DAYLIGHT, said ninjas are bloody useless. Crunchy kung-fu abounds, but the major innovation is Chuck's think-bubble inner-voice, spilling out Chuck Thoughts like a stuttering Tannoy ("Ninja-ja-ja. It cannot be-be-be..."). As the credits roll, Chuck stands silhouetted against a nervously rising sun. Yep. Even the *sun's* scared of Chuck.

With *Missing In Action* (1984), we enter Chuck's infamous Cannon Group Phase. Out go the martial arts, in come the Uzis and the bullet-proof beard. Centred on a POW rescue mission, *MIA* features *the* iconic Chuck shot — rising from a river, emptying an M60 in thundering slo-mo — but the film itself is total Hambo, mistaking overkill for excitement over two, lumpy hours.

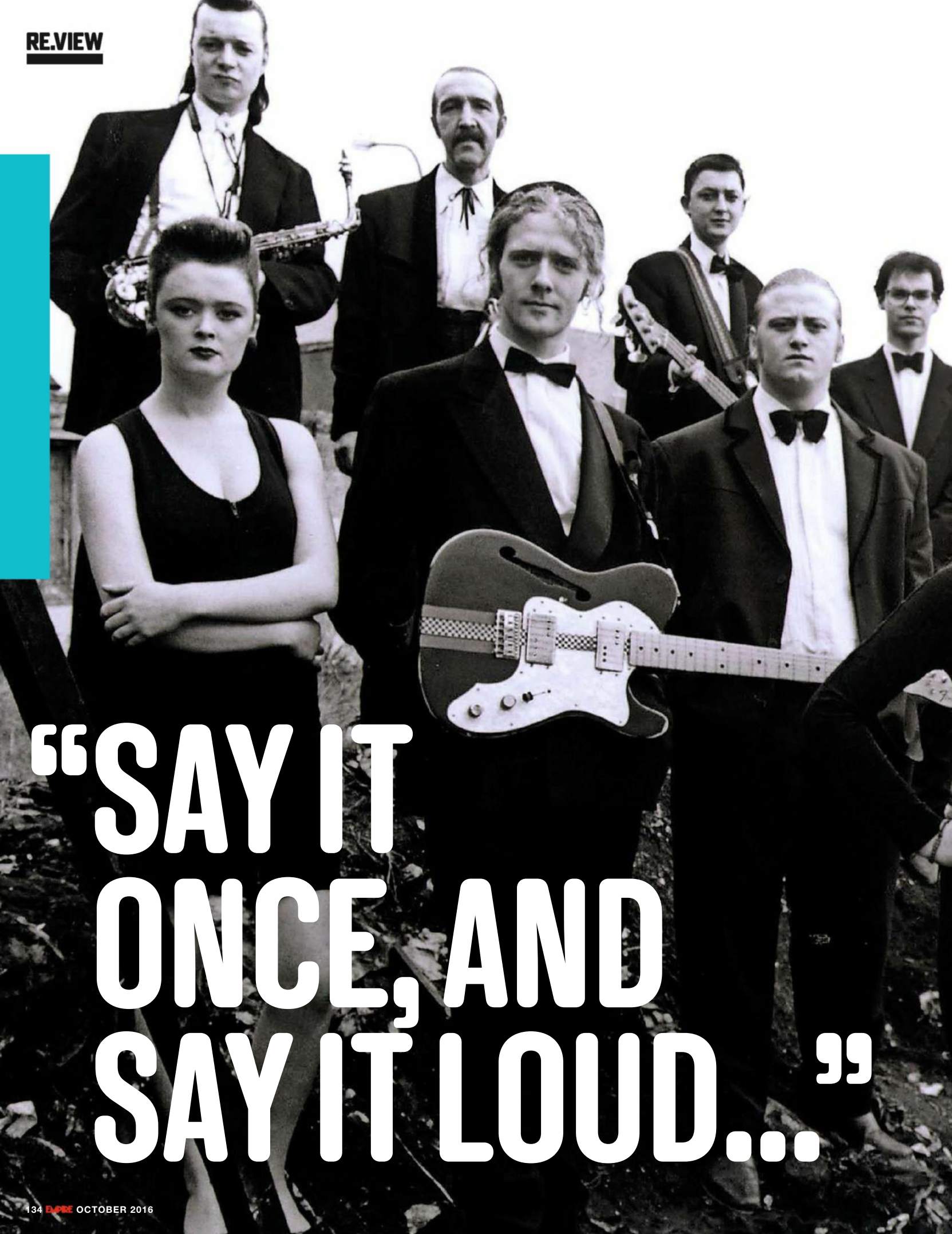
Directed by *The Fugitive*'s Andrew Davis, *Code Of Silence* (1985) is next. And it's a film that makes a mockery of the idea Chuck took acting classes at Oak Furniture Land. As an ostracised undercover cop battling mobsters and corruption, he's compelling in a meaty, tightly plotted thriller with gobsmacking stunt-work. With retro grit and ruthless twists, it's like the best Clint movie Clint never made, and no wonder: the script started life as a *Dirty Harry* sequel.

Five hours of non-stop Chuck and I swear my eyelids are starting to grow a beard. Another Cannon trash-fest, *Invasion USA* (1985) floods Florida with freedom-hating Communists. Enter Chuck: double-Uzis, double-denim and terrorist-proof Alan Partridge driving gloves. As Chuck exterminates Commies like a Republican action figure, the plot's obliterated too in a ricochet of absurd set-pieces. *Everything* blows up in *Invasion USA*. Everything except Chuck's pet armadillo. Why Chuck has a pet armadillo is never explained.

Having won the War On Communism, Chuck solves the War On Drugs in *Delta Force 2: The Colombian Connection* (1990). This was Chuck's last Cannon blow-out, and he skydives, swings through the jungle, even dodges a bazooka rocket. I'm probably concussed at this point but I've got a lot of time for Chuck's Delta Farce sequel: it's more a surreal action parody, with a fantastically snide turn from Billy Drago as a campy drug-lord — Panto Escobar, maybe.

As the '90s continued, Chuck crashed into direct-to-video hell. Paired with a pooch, *Top Dog* is a spectacularly misjudged family movie involving neo-Nazis, ultraviolence and, er, the Pope. Chuck is no comedian and this is no police dog. It's a salon-puffed, Disney-factory Briard, and as threatening as a cupcake. Whenever Chuck and the dog get too close they merge into one massive floating Chuck beard, but it's all a bit sad, like watching a superhero who's lost his powers. Poor Chuck. Defeated by a dog. Should've stuck with the armadillo.

***DELTA FORCE 2: THE COLOMBIAN CONNECTION* IS OUT ON 12 SEPTEMBER ON BLU-RAY**



"SAY IT ONCE, AND SAY IT LOUD..."



HOW ALAN PARKER'S *THE COMMITMENTS* GOT ITS SOUL

WORDS **IAN FREER**

AS POWERFUL AS a blast from the best brass section, Alan Parker's *The Commitments* was a jolt of joy in a humdrum early '90s British film scene. Based on Roddy Doyle's 1987 novel, it follows wide-boy music fanatic Jimmy Rabbitte (Robert Arkins) trying to assemble a soul band on the Northside of Dublin. Without a shamrock or leprechaun in sight, it offered a fresh view of contemporary Ireland, seasoned with great music, sharp laughs and an admirably creative use of swearing ("You ever call me a fuckin' eejit again, you'll go home with the drumsticks stuck up your hole"). Twenty-five years on, the director, writers Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, and key cast revisit the making of a one-hit wonder.

DESTINATION ANYWHERE

As a movie, *The Commitments* started life when producer Roger Randall-Cutler presented Roddy Doyle's unpublished novella to writers Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, best known for classic sitcoms like *The Likely Lads*, *Porridge* and *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*. "The characters just bounded off the page," says Clement. "But it was almost plotless." To up the story's stakes, Clement and La Frenais added a crucial element: Jimmy Rabbitte promising the band soul legend Wilson Pickett would turn up to their gig, only for Pickett to be a no-show, causing the band to implode. "It was the antithesis of the usual feel-good musical movie, where bands are on the verge of gigantic stardom," says La Frenais. "Instead, it all just dwindles apart. It was bittersweet."

It was Clement and La Frenais who took the project to Parker while the director was shooting *Come See The Paradise*. Parker, who had already made one big-screen musical with *Bugsy Malone*, and would go on to do another with *Evita*, was struck by "the richness of the dialogue" and the similarities between these Dublin kids and his own working-class upbringing in North London. "When I was younger, I turned to writing only when it became too obvious that, sadly, I was never going make it in a band," he says.

One element of the adaptation that caused concern was the volume of swear words. "We wrote the script and then rationed ourselves," says La Frenais. "We took a lot of 'fucks' out but then the cast put them all back in again. I think that was a nervous thing. They were more relaxed if they said, 'Fuckin' bollix.'" The film ended up with 168 F-bombs in 118 minutes. ›



Alan Parker (left) with the cast of *The Commitments*: "The most enjoyable film I ever made."

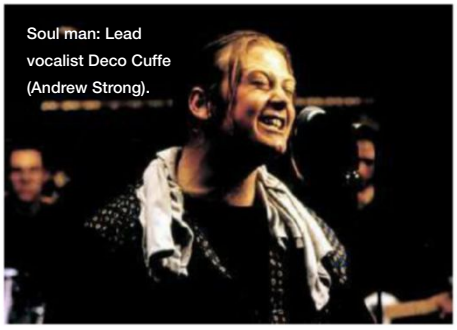
CHAIN OF FOOLS

Parker wanted his Commitments to fully commit, and actually be able to play, and sing. The process of putting the band together was intense. Arriving in Ireland, Parker became like a frenzied Steve Lamacq, taking in 64 bands in three days of auditions, before embarking on his own pub-crawl "seemingly seeing every band in Dublin". Finally, he staged an 'open call' at the Mansion House, seeing a further 1,500 acts. "The funniest was Dave Finnegan [Mickah the drummer], who appeared to swallow the microphone whole in his audition," he recalls. "I just had to put that in the film." Finnegan has his own memories of his casting. "Parker said, 'Who do you think you are?' and I threatened to put him through the wall. He said, 'That's very convincing.' I think that might have got me the part."

For the key role of Joey 'The Lips' Fagan, Parker met with Irish musical royalty Van Morrison at a London hotel. "He immediately asked if I'd order him a sandwich!" laughs Parker. "He was a bit grand for us. He wasn't keen on the classic soul music notion behind the film — he wanted us to use only his music. It didn't go any further." Bob Hoskins' name also came into the frame but Parker ultimately realised a big name alongside a cast of unknowns wouldn't work. "All these kids had an authenticity because you had never seen them before," says Dick Clement. "It made it feel real." Johnny Murphy got the role.

HARD TO HANDLE

"*The Commitments* was by far and away the most enjoyable film I ever made," says Parker. "It was a combination of the subject matter, the camaraderie of the Anglo/Irish crew, filming music and a great cast of unknowns — not a movie star among them. Hence there were no limos, trailers or tantrums. Every day was filled with music, laughter and joy — and believe me, that's not normal on any film." Still it wasn't all plain sailing. Particularly when it came to Glen Hansard — who would later write and star in *Once* — who played guitarist Outspan Foster. "Glen wasn't the most concentrated of actors,"



Soul man: Lead vocalist Deco Cuffe (Andrew Strong).



Backing singers Bernie McGloughlin, Natalie Murphy and Imelda Quirke.

remembers Colm Meaney, who played Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. "When we were shooting the scene in the pigeon loft, Glen couldn't stop laughing. Alan would say to him, 'Glen, it's not funny.' So we'd go again and Glen would laugh again. After six takes of this, Alan just exploded. It focussed Glen's concentration very quickly."

Given the inexperienced nature of his cast, Parker changed his filmmaking MO. "I shot with three cameras and improvised a lot, so that I could capture the 'inspired mistakes'," he says. "Photographically, it has a grittier look than some of my other films, I suppose to keep it earthy and real — not to look too piss-elegant."

TOO MANY FISH IN THE SEA

To whittle down the songs used in the movie, Parker started with "cassettes" — the '90s version of playlists — of over 300 soul songs, "from Otis Redding to James Brown; less the Motown songs mentioned in the novel." Some of the choices came down to brute economics. "You rang up to clear the music and if it was too expensive, you didn't use it," says La Frenais.

As the band had to get better over the course of the film, Parker's decision to cast musicians who could act paid dividends. "We had to detune the guitar, play a few wrong notes and make mistakes," says Kenneth McCluskey, who played bassist Derek. Parker also recorded all the vocals live, using "out of phase" speakers, meaning the backing track could be played at full volume but the singing be 'for real'. "That way, we avoided miming, so the energy and spirit of the music really comes through," says Parker. "Some of [lead singer Deco] Andrew Strong's close ups are magical because they're live and true."

LAND OF A THOUSAND DANCES

To support the film's US release in August 1991, the cast were flown to Los Angeles to play a series of gigs. "We played in front of James Brown at the Grammys," marvels Finnegan. They even played *In The Midnight Hour* with Wilson Pickett, providing the ending the film never delivered. Upon its release, *The Commitments* received glowing reviews, but was only a modest success on its initial American run. "They mistimed it," believes Clement. "There's always a time in the summer schedule when the big films are getting a bit tired and you need something fresh."

Still, the film has had an amazing after-life, spawning two hit compilations albums, Commitments tribute bands (featuring the cast), and a hit musical. While Meaney's Jimmy Rabbitte Sr. returned in *The Snapper* and *The Van*, there has never been a direct sequel, even though Harvey Weinstein once approached Clement and Le Frenais to write one. "We had a very good idea of how to start it," says Clement of what we're guessing would have been *The Commitments 2: Electric Guitar Boogaloo*. "They hear that Joey 'The Lips' hasn't got long to live and they all rally around him, but it was bullshit he floated to seduce them all into coming back together again. It was a lovely idea but we didn't know how to end it." Perhaps it's a good thing. *The Commitments* ends on the perfect poignant note. Sometimes, despite the clamouring of the crowd, there is no need for an encore.

***THE COMMITMENTS*: 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION IS OUT ON 19 SEPTEMBER ON DVD AND BLU-RAY**

THE EMPIRE VERDICT

THE COMMITMENTS
★★★★
CERT **15**

What we said: "With plenty of gritty Dublin humour, and a succession of very funny vignettes, almost in the Bill Forsyth tradition, *The Commitments* has a sense of fun."
Notable extras: An Alan Parker commentary; new interview with Parker and cast; a music video.

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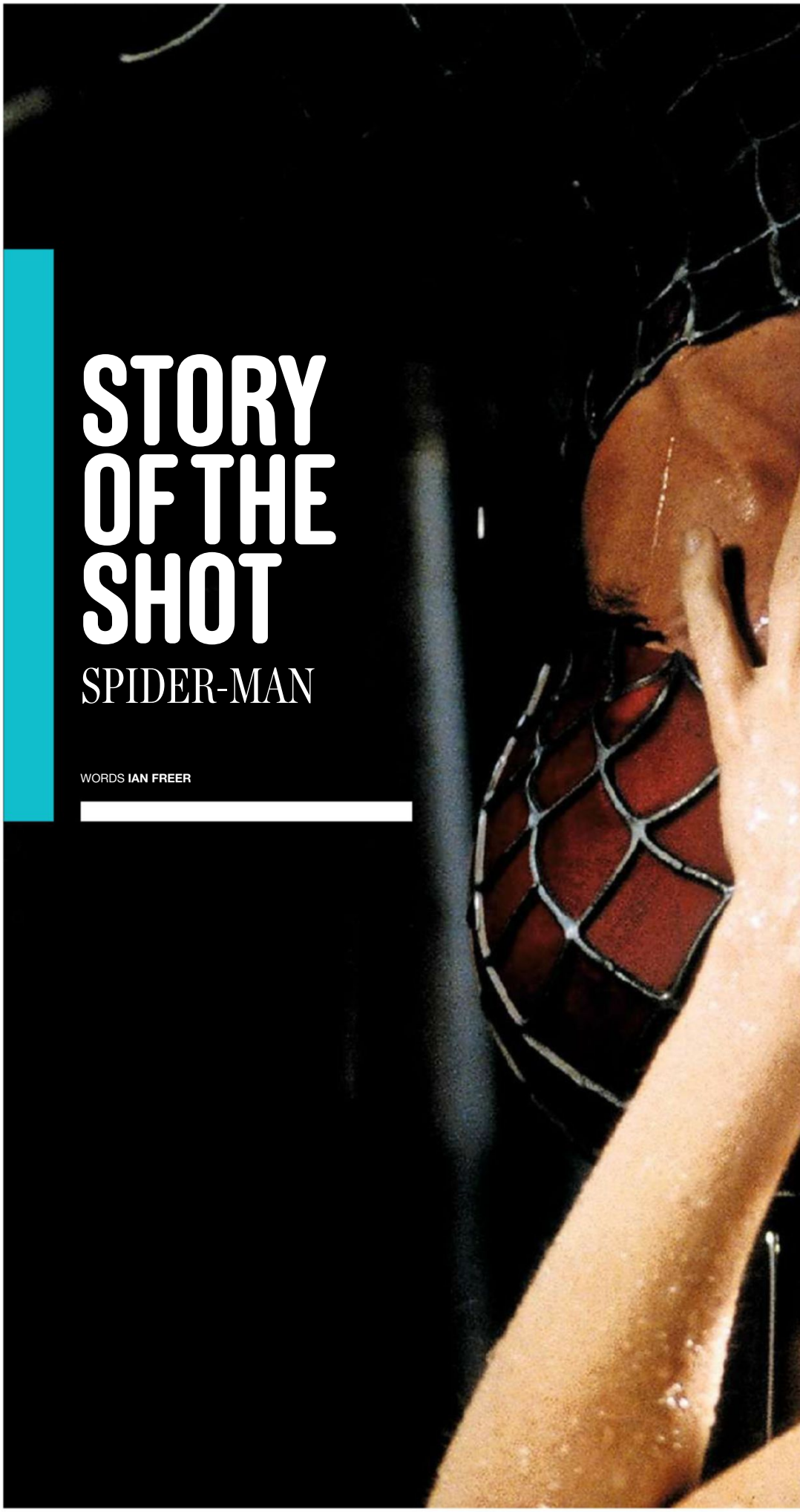
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STORY OF THE SHOT

SPIDER-MAN

WORDS **IAN FREER**



ON 19 JULY 2015 at 10.38pm, Ryan Reynolds tweeted the following via his @VancityReynolds account: "The 'upside down Spider-Man kiss' is pretty embarrassing when the rope's 2 feet longer than planned. You should see my Dad's face." It is testament to the staying power of *Spider-Man*'s upended smooch some 13 years after its release.

After saving Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst) from muggers, Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire)disappears, then surprises MJ by appearing upside down in front of her. After some flirty in-jokery ("You are AMAZING!"), MJ pulls down his mask to reveal Peter Parker's lips and leans in for a passionate kiss. It's a moment that skirts the line between corny and heartfelt, and adds a rare moment of sexiness into the mostly sexless superhero genre — partly because of MJ's restraint in not ripping off the whole mask. It could have turned out very differently.

"One thing I always thought was funny is what if Mary Jane pulled down Spider-Man's mask and he was some creepy old dude?" Dunst later reflected. "That was very risky of MJ."

The iconic shot doesn't have an antecedent in Spidey comic-book lore, instead coming straight from David Koepp's screenplay. The shot (like the kiss) was snatched late at night on the 'New York Street' of Warner Bros' LA backlot, as fake rain battered down. Most kissing scenes only have the awkwardness of two strangers snogging to deal with. *Spider-Man* was a whole other level of difficult. "Because of all the water pouring down I couldn't breathe," recalled Maguire. "The rain was pouring up my nose. Then she was kissing me and I couldn't breathe out of my mouth, so I had to hold my breath while I was kissing her. I would sneak little breaths out of the corner of my mouth — it was still nice!" Dunst faced challenges too. "It was freezing," she remembered. "It was pretty challenging to act all romantic and warm in the summer rain. But really it was so cold."

Still, the hardship was worth it, winning Best Kiss at the MTV Awards and has been parodied by the likes of *The Simpsons* (three times), *Robot Chicken*, *Shrek 2*, *Spider-Man XXX: A Porn Parody* (don't ask) and, perhaps most famously, *The OC*, in which Seth (Adam Brody), in a Spidey mask, kisses Summer (Rachel Bilson) to a dreadful cover of Oasis' *Champagne Supernova* by Matt Pond PA. Still, the original has proved hard to top. "When we started Sam Raimi gave me a little coffee-table book of movie kisses," admitted Dunst. "And he said, 'Let's try and make this one as epic as these kisses.'" So I thought, 'That's a nice idea... Yeah, right, we'll see.' I never expected it to be one of those things." With great snogging, it seems, comes great acclaim. And a head cold.

***SPIDER-MAN* IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD**















THE FIRST-TAKE CLUB

Filling in those filmic blind spots, one person at a time

3 MULHOLLAND DR.

THE IDEA OF The First-Take Club is simple. Every month, we ask someone to watch a film that they haven't seen from Empire's 301 Greatest Movies Of All Time list (published in 2014), and tell us what they thought. This month, Tess Morris — writer of the Simon Pegg rom-com Man Up — tackles her egregious oversight: David Lynch's baffling, brilliant 2001 psychodrama, Mulholland Dr. Pray silencio for Tess' take.

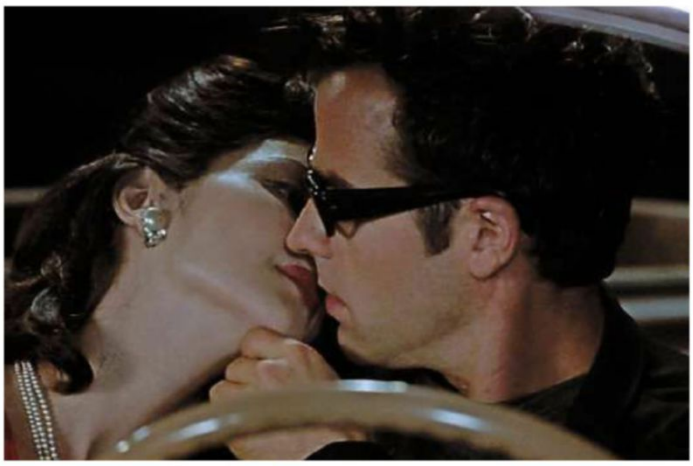
First things first. I'm not a Lynch-head. I loved *Twin Peaks* as a teen, I watched *Blue Velvet* and said pretentious things about it during my film degree, but my favourite movie of his is actually *The Straight Story*, probably his least Lynch-like movie. And I'm not sure why I never saw *Mulholland Drive*, or *Mulholland Dr.* to give it its original title, but I remember lots of men going on and on about the lesbian sex scenes, which put a bee in my bonnet, and then people talked about it incessantly, which built it up into godlike status. So I filed it away in that part of my brain marked "watch when less hyped". Then never watched it.

Cut to: last year, when I moved to Los Angeles. And unbeknownst to me, did exactly what Naomi Watts does in the movie, when she steps off the plane at LAX, and exclaims, "I can't believe it!" Okay, not exactly that, but a version of. This city has that effect on you.

And then I find myself often driving around, and sometimes even on, Mulholland Dr, once








even getting lost on it, and having to follow a lovely, very helpful local couple down the hill. Was this just like the movie, *Mulholland Dr.*? I would never know, unless I finally watched it.

When it came out in 2001, *The New York Times* said that some may find it "an offence against narrative order". As a screenwriter, and a structure junkie, this did not bode well for me. But I decided to be open to a non-linear story, and just go with it. Turns out, that's exactly what you need to do.

From the opening credits, Lynch's film also requires you to concentrate. For a brief time I thought I had actually seen it, then realised that was *Inland Empire*. I applauded when I saw Dan Hedaya and Robert Forster's names in the credits, only to find they didn't feature as heavily as I would have liked. But it got a huge Angelo Badalamenti thumbs up from me, score-wise. Plus it had the woman from *Sunset Beach*, Laura Harring, in it. We were off to a good start.

I was very into the first half hour of this film. But I had to ask myself, "Is that because Naomi Watts has moved into a very similar complex to the one you now live in (minus the uninvited guest), and because you recognise lots of the locations, and because part of the reason you moved to LA was because you *love* films set in LA?" All these questions went through my head, as I struggled to understand what the film was trying to say about life. I perked up for some of the random vignettes — particularly the 'little black book' murder scene, and the glorious Spanish rendition that lady does of Roy Orbison's *Crying*. Oh, and the famous jump-scare behind the diner? I jumped.

But I'm not going to lie, I did find myself taking offence at the narrative order. Less offence at Justin Theroux, who plays the most believable arsehole Hollywood director ever, and Watts and Harring are fantastic. The sex scenes are also brilliant — sexy like they should be, without feeling too 'male gaze'. And I get why people like this film. It's atmospheric, it's sensual, it's surreal. But by the end, I just felt a bit sleepy, and a bit confused. Either way, I'm going to stick to driving on Mulholland Dr, rather than watching it again.

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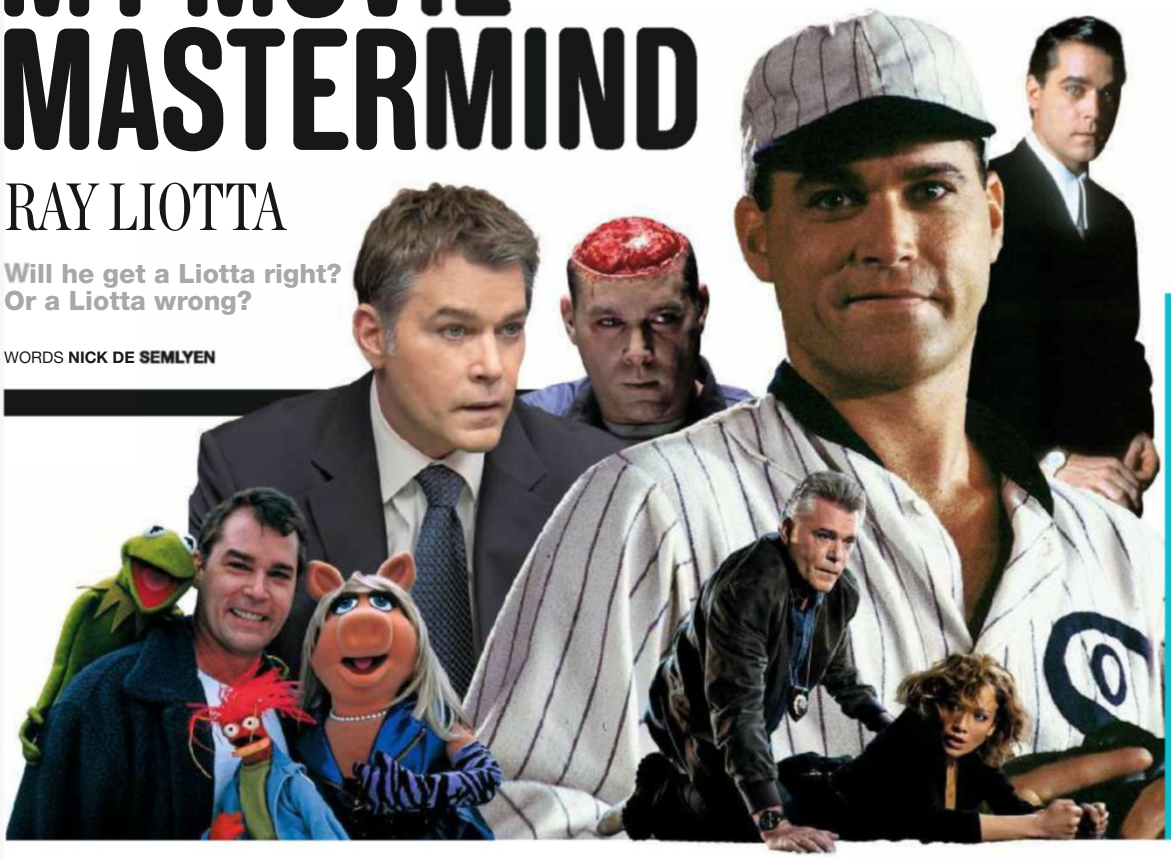
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MY MOVIE MASTERMIND

RAY LIOTTA

Will he get a Liotta right? Or a Liotta wrong?

WORDS **NICK DE SEMLYEN**



LEADER BOARD

Ben Kingsley	9.5
Christopher Lee	9.5
David O. Russell	9.5
Quentin Tarantino	9.5
Robert Rodriguez	9
Guillermo del Toro	9
Werner Herzog	9
Christian Slater	8.5
Bryan Singer	8.5
John Waters	8

1 Which song accompanies the famous Copacabana tracking shot in *GoodFellas*?
You know, I've only seen the movie twice. It's been over 20 years since I saw it. But let me see if I can... I know *Layla*'s over the garbage cans and the pink car. I've no idea. What is it?
The correct answer is *Then He Kissed Me* by The Crystals.

2 How does Hannibal Lecter cook your brains in *Hannibal*?
He fried 'em, didn't he? Do you know what I ate? That would have been the better question. Dark-meat chicken. I think I only did one or two takes, but I remember spitting 'em out! Dark-meat chicken, I just can't do it. It was *chewy*.
Correct.

3 In *Observe And Report*, what do you hit Seth Rogen with?
Wait, wait, wait. Where do I do it? Or does that give it away? I don't know. Sounds like it was probably an improv bit. I probably picked up a bit of set and just hit him with it. That movie I only saw once and it had to be 100 years ago, but I do think it was underrated. I can understand why it wasn't big, because it was so raw and out-there.
The correct answer is an information sign.

4 Which actor kills you in *Smokin' Aces*?
No idea! Did I get it in the elevator? That film was alright, but there was a personal element with that I don't care to get into. I liked hanging out with Alicia Keys. I just saw her the other day.
The correct answer is Nestor Carbonell, who plays Acosta. Liotta's Donald Carruthers is fatally injured during their elevator shoot-out.

5 In *Field Of Dreams*, what does Shoeless Joe Jackson say getting thrown out of baseball was like?
I've never seen the movie. I like watching live baseball games, but I'm not fanatical. Some people watch 162 games a year!
The correct answer is, "Having part of me amputated."

6 You appear in *Bee Movie* as yourself. Can you name the other movie in which you do that?
Yeah. Wait. *Stretch*. I knew Joe Carnahan from *Smokin' Aces* and *Narc* and he just called me up. As for *Bee Movie*, I was at a restaurant and Jerry [Seinfeld] was there. He said, "It's so funny... we were just thinking of using you in an animated movie." They actually made Ray Liotta Honey and gave it to journalists.
Correct.

7 You were a guest caller on an episode of *Frasier*. At what time of year did the episode take place?
Interesting way that happened. I was at a Lakers game and the guy behind me was having trouble sitting. I overheard him say he had a bad back. I told him I had a bad back for years and the way I fixed it was to tighten up my stomach. It turned out he was the executive producer of *Frasier* and he offered me that cameo. Anyway... Thanksgiving?
The correct answer is Christmas.

8 In *Muppets From Space*, how does Miss Piggy get past your security guard?
She blows some love dust into my eyes or something.
Half a point. The correct answer is mind-control gas.

9 In which film do you play a character called Deluca?
The Iceman? No, in that I played a real person. Deluca — I think I was a cop. Was it *Cop Land*?
The correct answer is *The Place Beyond The Pines*.

10 What's the name of the motel in *Identity*?
I don't know. It probably has to do with the mind, right, because that movie was psychological? Was it Bates? [*Hears the answer*] You tricked me, man!
The correct answer is it doesn't have one.

RAY LIOTTA SCORES 2.5

"These questions I like! You guys really know your shit. You must have interns watching Ray Liotta movies around the clock."

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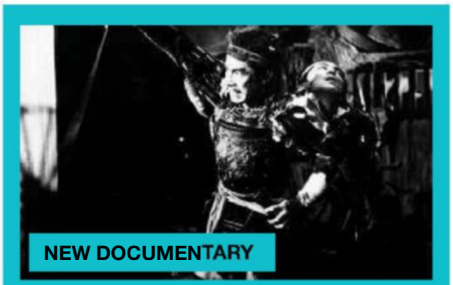
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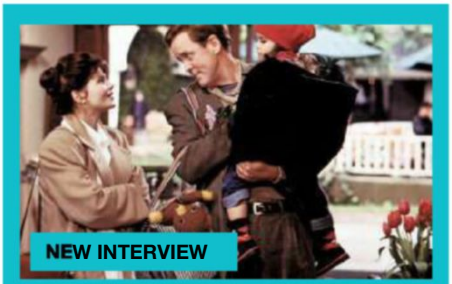


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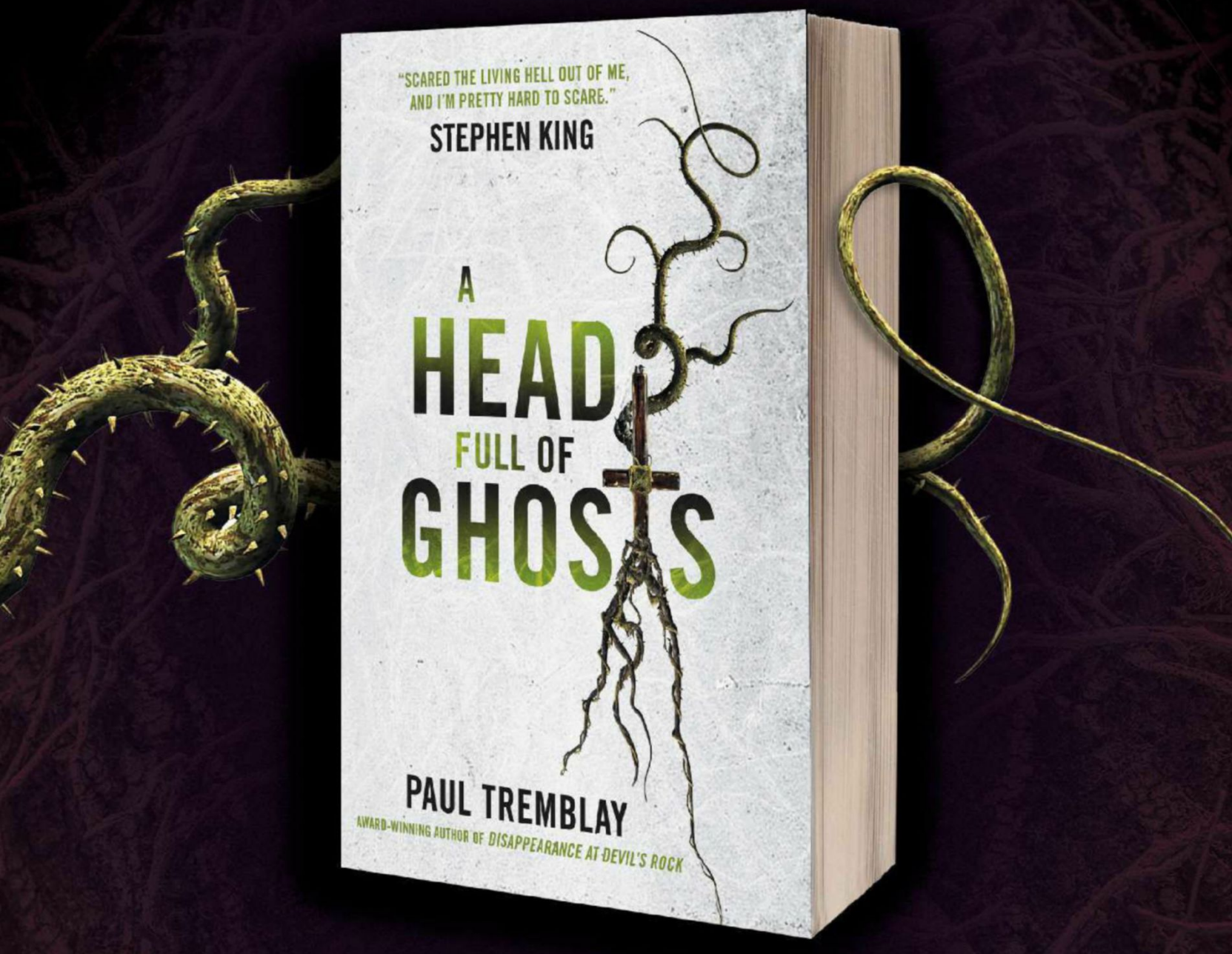
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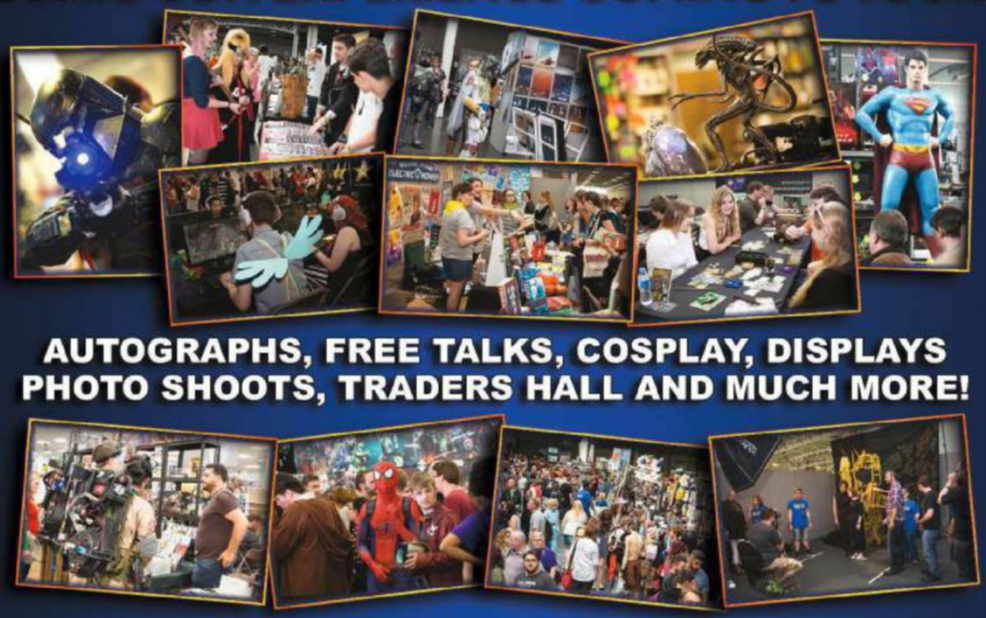
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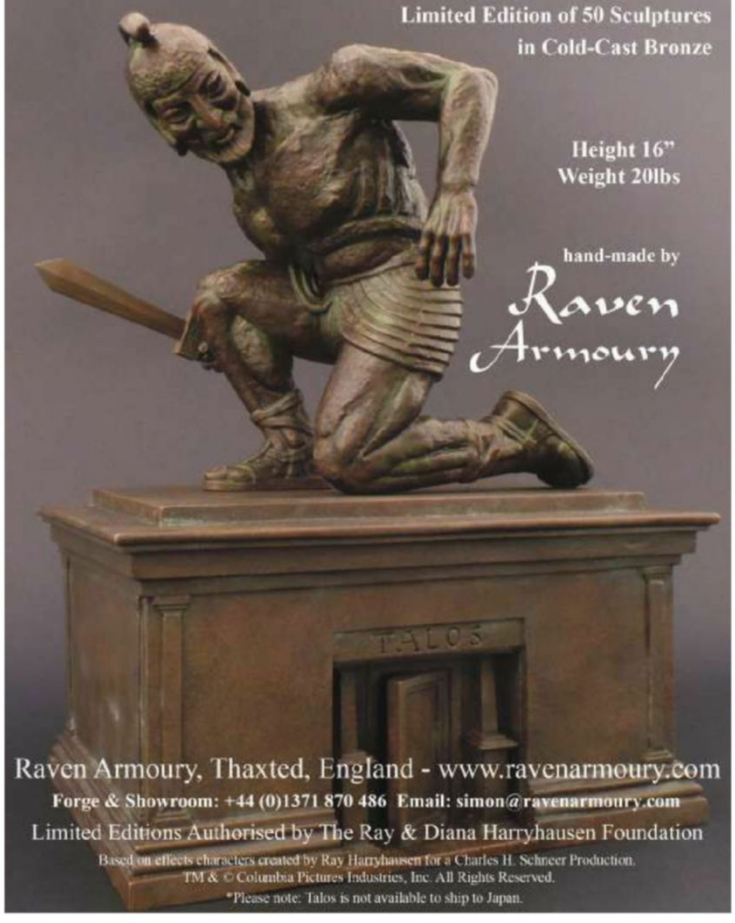
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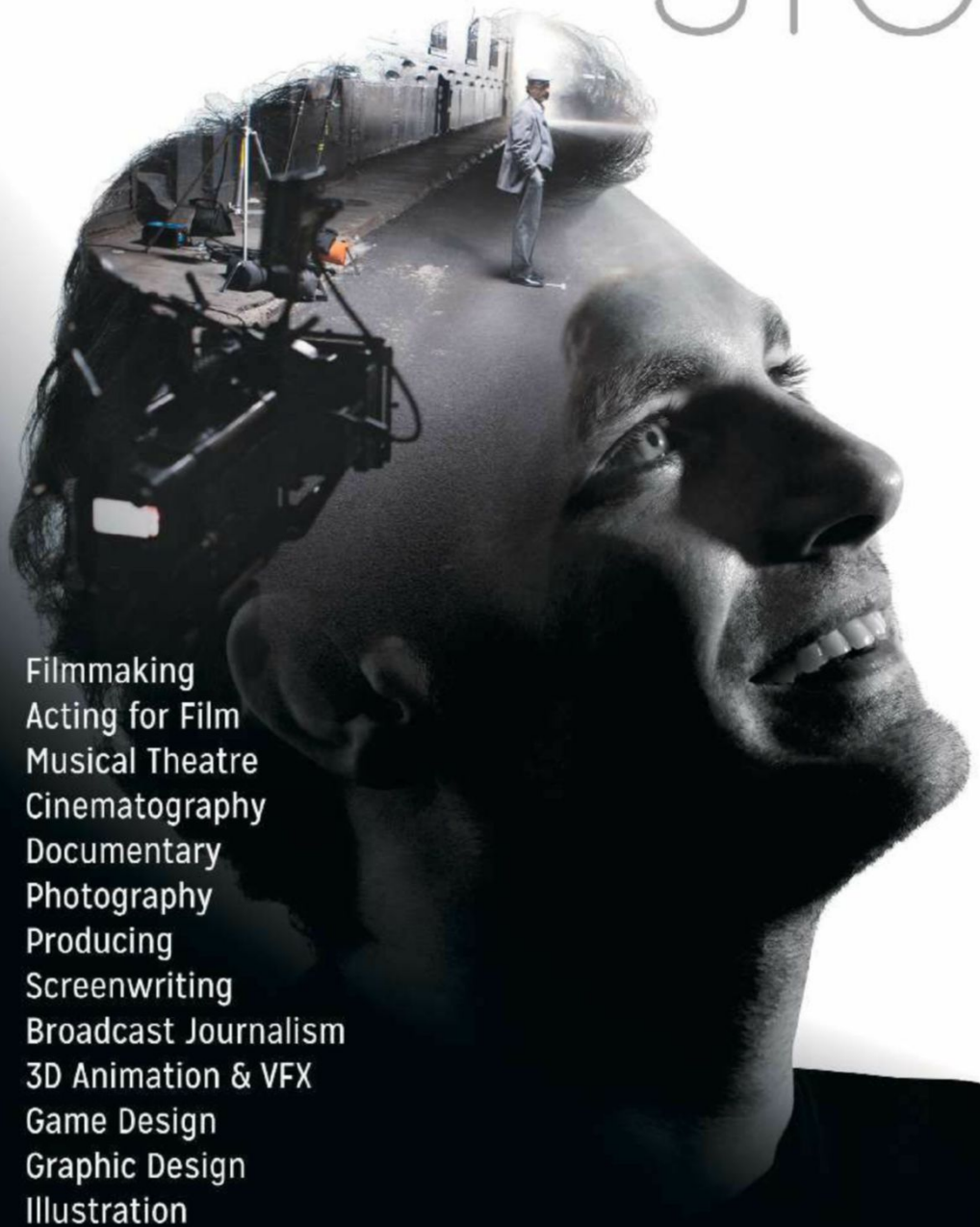
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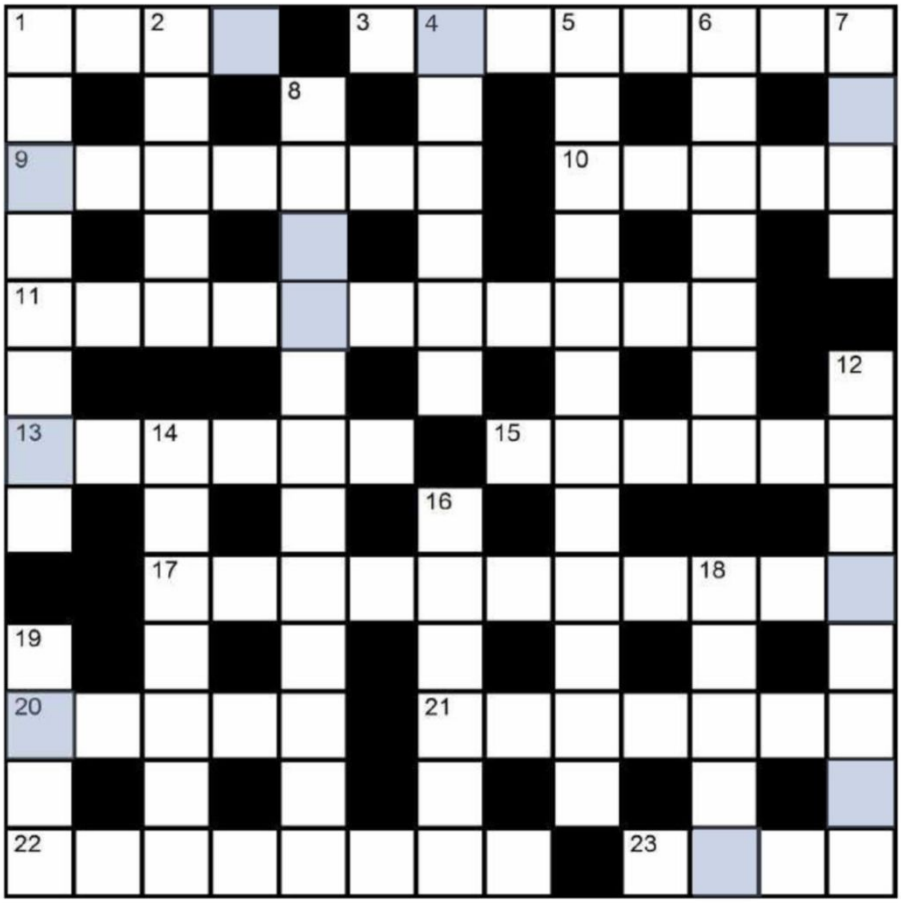
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CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 It was also furious for Vin Diesel (4)
3 Twelve were required for this courtroom classic (5,3)
9 Western that linked Sean Connery and Brigitte Bardot (7)
10 *The River* — (James Earl Jones, Cicely Tyson (5)
11 Fishy Pixar tale with Ellen DeGeneres (7,4)
13 Spike Lee's remake of a South Korean movie (6)
15 Boxing drama starring Michael Caine (6)
17 "There's something about your first piece" ran the tagline for this hit sex comedy (8,3)
20 Sly Stallone's violent Vietnam survivor (5)
21 Could be Wood, could be Portman (7)
22 Disturbed Neal Koch becomes an award-winning English director (3,5)
23 Monkees movie famed for its Jack Nicholson involvement (4)

DOWN

1 Richard Linklater's burger-stuffed Nation (4,4)
2 Michael Jai White in superhero guise (5)
4 Lupita, the voice of Raksha in *The Jungle Book* (6)
5 Harrison Ford and Kristin Scott Thomas' 1999 romantic encounter (6,6)
6 She was born Margaret Hyra (7)
7 Film that starred Ewan McGregor as writer James Joyce (4)
8 He portrayed Martin Luther King in Selma (5,7)
12 Julianne Moore's gay rights weepie (8)
14 Movie that featured Johnny Depp in gunslinger mode (4,3)
16 It featured William Holden and Kim Novak in an iconic dance scene (6)
18 Horror flick starring Kristen Bell that was part-penned by Wes Craven (5)
19 Monty Python's big-screen viking (4)

COMPETITION

WIN!

A 49" ULTRA HD SMART LED TV, BLU-RAY PLAYER PLUS A VOD COPY OF SCI-FI THRILLER *CELL*



Stephen King adaptation *Cell* is out in cinemas and available to download from 26 August, with its premiere at FrightFest on the 25th, and we've got a Panasonic Viera TC-49DX Smart 4K Ultra HD 49" LED TV, Samsung DVD & Blu-ray player and a VOD copy of the film up for grabs. Starring John Cusack and Samuel L Jackson, and co-adapted by King himself, *Cell* sees society descend into chaos after a mysterious mobile-phone signal turns users into frenzied killers, leaving distraught father Clay Riddell (Cusack) struggling to find his estranged wife and son before they're lynched by the 'phoners'… To be in with a chance of getting your hands on the hardware, simply complete the crossword, solve the anagram and text your answer to the number below.

***CELL* IS IN CINEMAS AND AVAILABLE TO DOWNLOAD FROM 26 AUGUST**

COMPETITION ENDS 26 SEPTEMBER

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, actress, director or character. Text 'EMPIRE' to 83070, followed by your answer, name and address (with a space between each element of your message!). Texts cost 50p plus standard operator costs. Lines close at midnight, September 26. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

SEPTEMBER ANSWERS ACROSS: 1 Jaws, **3** Third Man, **9** Melissa, **10** Viggo, **11** Strawberries, **13** Marsha, **15** The One, **17** Stolen Hearts, **20** Craig, **21** Grimsby, **23** The Steal, **24** Goal. **DOWN: 1** Jim, **2** Wyler, **4** Heaven, **5** River Phoenix, **6** Magneto, **7** Noon, **8** I Saw The Light, **11** Simm, **12** Reds, **14** Rat Race, **16** Enigma, **18** Russo, **19** Ice-T, **22** Yul. **ANAGRAM MARGOT ROBBIE**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Texts cost 50p + standard network rate. Ask the bill payer's permission before entering. Entries must be received before September 27 or will not be valid (but the cost of the text may still be charged). One winner will be selected at random. The model of the TV and Blu-ray may vary. Competition promoted by Bauer Consumer Media Limited t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, by phone (on the number the text was sent), between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will call the winner a maximum of three times and leave one message. If the winner does not answer the phone or respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner and the original winner will not win a prize. Entrants must be over 18, resident in the UK and not be employed by Empire. The prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full Ts&Cs see http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html.



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THE EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK CHOSEN BY MATTHEW VAUGHN



"One of the most important scenes for me, that I always reference when making movies, is at the beginning of Steven Spielberg's *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*," says Matthew Vaughn. "The moment for me is not the ball rolling, it's after all that when Indiana Jones gets into the plane and sees a snake. It made me realise that after I've seen this guy be a hero and do everything, he's flawed. It's funny, and you can relate to him. That was a big lesson for me."

EXT. JUNGLE — DAY

Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) leaps out of the temple, falls down a hill, and sits upright to find Hovito natives pointing spears at him. Jones' gaze falls on Barranca (Vic Tablian), one of his guides. Barranca falls forward, lethal blow darts in his back. A pair of boots fills the frame. Jones looks up to see fellow archaeologist René Belloq (Paul Freeman).

BELLOQ: Doctor Jones. Again we see that there is nothing you can possess that I cannot take away. And you thought I had given up.

He beckons for Indy's gun. Indy takes it out of his holster. The natives move closer, bows at the ready. Indy gives Belloq the gun.

BELLOQ: You chose the wrong friends. This time it will cost you.

Indy takes the idol out of his jacket pocket.

INDY: Too bad the Hovitos don't know you the way I do, Belloq.

He gives it to him.

BELLOQ: Yes, too bad. You could warn them, if only you spoke Hovitos.

Belloq turns and holds the idol high, making a proclamation in Hovitos. The Hovitos immediately bow down. Indy sees his chance and bolts. Belloq signals for them to chase him. As they do, he holds the idol and laughs maniacally. Indy is pursued through the jungle by the Hovitos. We cut to a seaplane sitting on the river. Its pilot, Jock, is fishing, his feet dangling in the water. Indy runs towards him, the Hovitos close behind.

INDY: Jock! Start the engines! Get it up!

Jock looks up as he hears Indy approach. Indy has a headstart on his hunters, but they are unrelenting.

INDY: START THE ENGINES! START THE ENGINES, JOCK!

Jock climbs into the plane. Indy is still being chased while the plane slowly starts… He emerges from the undergrowth, grabs a vine and swings out into the river. He drops into the water and swims towards the plane as spears and blow darts narrowly whistle past him. Reaching the plane, Indy climbs onto the pontoon, then clambers into the cockpit as it takes off. Indy looks down to see a python crawling into his lap.

INDY: There's a big snake in the plane, Jock!

JOCK: Oh, that's just my pet snake, Reggie!

INDY: I hate snakes, Jock! I hate 'em!

JOCK: Come on! Show a little backbone, will ya?

The plane flies into the evening sky.

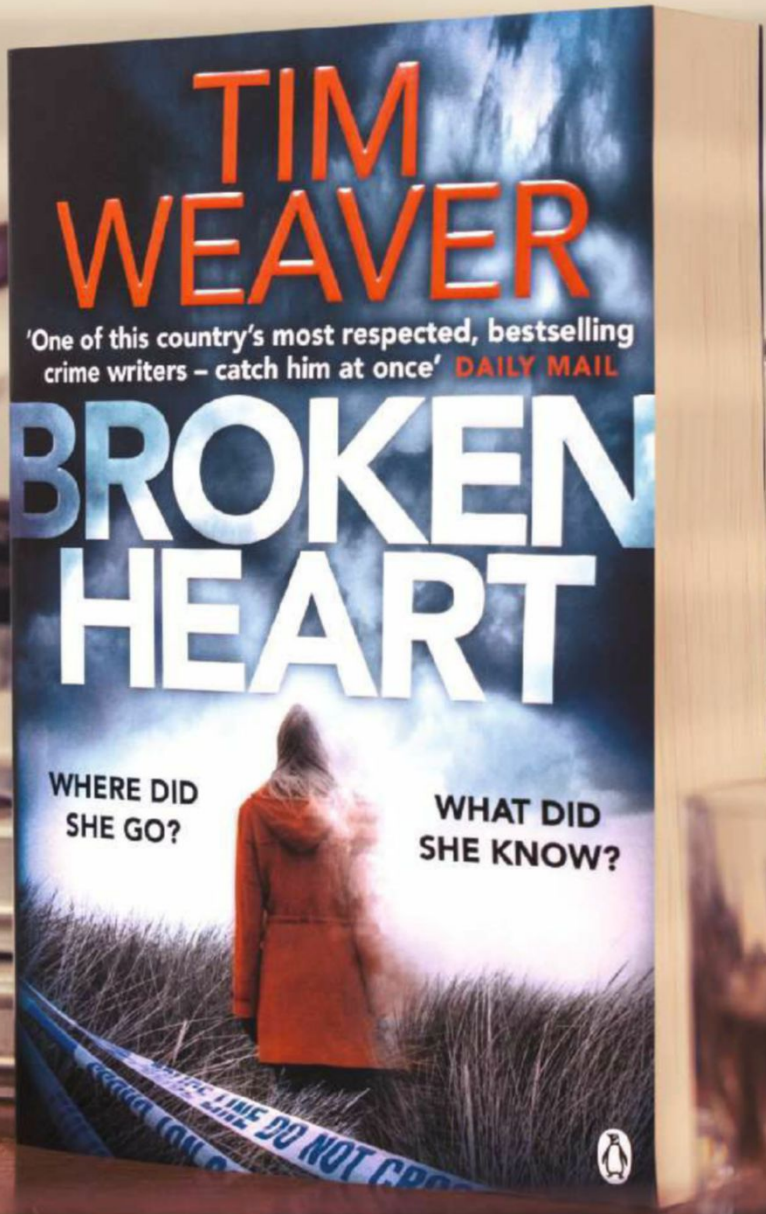
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